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*Security in the Nation's
Capital and the Closure of
Pennsylvania Avenue: An
Assessment*

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PREFACE

Acts of terrorism are not a new threat to Washington, D.C. Over the last two centuries, there have been several organized terrorist attacks, as well as numerous assaults by unstable individuals acting alone, that have targeted the White House and U.S. Capitol building and the President or U.S. Congressmen within the city limits of the District of Columbia. It was not, however, until the 1980s that such incidents evoked heightened security around the White House, initiating a process of fortification that culminated with President Clinton's decision in April 1995 to close the section of Pennsylvania Avenue running in front of the Mansion.

The research reported here considers how Pennsylvania Avenue can be re-opened while still ensuring to the greatest extent possible the safety and security of the President of the United States. The study was conducted as part of a project entitled, "Assessment of Physical Security Measures," within RAND's Criminal Justice Research Program. This work is being carried out as part of a larger undertaking by the Federal City Council—a nonprofit, nonpartisan, Washington, D.C.-based organization dedicated to the improvement of the Nation's Capital—aimed at reassessing and reconsidering the physical security measures that have been imposed on the District of Columbia in recent years.

This document is a revised version of a previous draft that was reviewed by the client. It is currently being reviewed internally as part of RAND's quality assurance process and will shortly be published in final form as a Monograph Report (MR).

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SUMMARY

For most of the White House's 200 year-old existence, U.S. presidents embraced the Jeffersonian principle of maintaining the Executive Mansion as the "People's House": that is, keeping it as open and accessible to the public as possible. It was not, however, until the 1980s that a series of incidents evoked heightened security around the White House, initiating a process of fortification that culminated with President Clinton's decision in April 1995 to close the section of Pennsylvania Avenue running in front of the Executive Mansion. This unprecedented step was taken at the behest of the U.S. Secret Service (USSS), which had concluded that it would be impossible to protect the White House from a large truck bomb if the street in front of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue remained open. Only five weeks earlier a massive truck bomb had exploded outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal office building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 persons and injuring hundreds of others. The parallels drawn between the Murrah Building blast and the potential for a similar incident in front of the White House were reportedly instrumental in the President's decision to finally accede to the Secret Service's repeated entreaties to bar all traffic traveling on Pennsylvania Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets.

Five years on, the truncation of this vital cross-town artery, linking the western and eastern parts of the city, has continued to disrupt traffic and commuting patterns, adversely affected local businesses, and hampered access to the newly revitalized downtown city center. The closure, moreover, has not only created inconvenience and led to revenue loss, but is also seen to project an image of fortification and security that is at once both undesirable and inappropriate given the open and democratic society that is the defining characteristic of our nation. Perhaps most disquieting is that a decision which was implemented in response to a specific event (e.g., the Murrah building bombing), and that was necessarily influenced by then-existent security and technological limitations, has since that

time evolved into an established *fait accompli*—imposed without any subsequent evaluation, discussion or consideration.

In light of the above, RAND was asked to examine the question of whether Pennsylvania Avenue could be opened while still providing the requisite level of security needed to mitigate the threat to the life of the President from a truck bomb. This report, accordingly, seeks to identify what range of measures might be considered to offset that threat while at the same time preserving to the greatest extent possible normal traffic patterns and daily life in the city. Its principal findings and conclusions are as follows:

1. The 1995 explosion at the Murrah Building has perhaps less relevance than has been commonly assumed to the threat of a similar truck bomb attack directed against the White House. The vehicle containing the bomb in Oklahoma City was parked *less than ten feet away* from the structure when the blast occurred. *By comparison, the White House is set some 350 ft. back from the south curb of Pennsylvania Avenue*: a distance more than thirty five times greater from where the Murrah building truck bomb was situated.

2. Trends in terrorism today, both within the U.S. and overseas, present a more mixed and uncertain picture than is often depicted. Rather than an ineluctably worsening situation accompanied by an escalation of terrorist violence, FBI statistics reveal that nearly ten times more terrorist incidents were recorded in the U.S. during the 1980s than between 1990 and 1998. Moreover, 95 percent of those terrorist acts did not in fact kill anyone. Nor is the situation markedly different overseas despite the dominant perception to the contrary. According to U.S. State Department figures, for instance, six times as many Americans were killed by terrorists outside the U.S. during the 1980s as compared with the subsequent decade.

3. The decision taken in 1995 to close the section of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House appears to have been regarded as permanent. Thus, in contrast to the forward thinking and dynamic responses that have characterized the Clinton administration's overall approach to the terrorist threat, the issue of physical security in and

around the Executive Mansion appears to have been treated in a way that is both static and one dimensional: based on a decision that has arguably been inappropriately frozen in time and thereby is unable to take advantage of new technologies and potentially innovative approaches to physical security that may have been developed since that time.

4. In addition, given the increased attention, larger budgets and expanded number of law enforcement and intelligence personnel devoted to strengthening our counterterrorism response capabilities since the Oklahoma City bombing, the U.S. is arguably far better prepared to address the threat of terrorism than ever before—and especially since the 1994/95 time frame when the existing security procedures along Pennsylvania Avenue were put into place. This realization should therefore be as much a factor in security planning and design as the worst case scenarios that are now embraced.

5. Justifications for Pennsylvania Avenue's continued closure now extend beyond the original explanation of assuring the safety of the President and his family from cataclysmic truck bomb attacks. Current security policy governing Pennsylvania Avenue has thus not benefited from the independent, outside consultation and evaluation that helped determine the 1995 decision and thus is arguably being unilaterally defined and extended by federal law enforcement authorities.

6. The security policy around the White House is unlike that in force at any other federal government building or historic landmark in the District of Columbia—including, for example, the U.S. Capitol building and U.S. Supreme Court—thus ignoring a cardinal principle of security planning: uniform application.

7. There should be a comprehensive independent, examination of whether the 800 foot setback defined by the Secret Service is in fact the absolute minimum distance required to adequately protect the Executive Mansion. Such an assessment should clearly explicate—and justify—the context within which stand-off determinations are gauged, particularly with regard to questions over acceptable and unacceptable levels of building damage.

8. Various proposed measures could achieve the goal of securing the President's personal protection from catastrophic truck bomb threats

while still remaining true to the principles of open access and unrestricted freedom of movement around our nation's most important historical landmarks. A range of potential alternatives and options therefore deserve thoughtful consideration and careful evaluation.

Among these are the following:

- The section of Pennsylvania Avenue that runs between Jackson Place and Madison Place could be bounded with some form of fixed barriers, that could be constructed in such a way as to permit access by cars, taxicabs, and sport utility vehicles while preventing entry by trucks, buses, or other unauthorized vehicles.
- Defensive measures could be instituted to Pennsylvania Avenue itself, including for example the construction of a modified "Jeffersonian bow" that would curve the mid-section of the Avenue northwards, adding another 35 to 40 feet of standoff distance in front of the White House.
- Physical counter-measures could be further enhanced through the introduction of state-of-the-art detection technology, including video surveillance and "in-road" explosive trace sensors. Such high-tech innovations could be combined with a re-configured executive protection force that would likely also have additional deterrent value.

The above proposals—and others like them—should not be blindly dismissed for the sake of maintaining complete control over that section of Pennsylvania Avenue between 15th Street and 17th Street, NW or to preserve the current status quo based on the assumption that any alternative is either too risky or too complicated to contemplate. Indeed, none of these measures are fool-proof and all could conceivably be defeated by a determined suicide attack involving a fanatically driven terrorist. The same caveat of course also applies to the entire spectrum of threats directed against the President. However, the issue here is not one of protecting the President from all possible contingencies; it is about enacting appropriate security measures that

address reasonable threat contingencies within the context of an acceptable level of risk.

It is essential that the Executive Mansion's defensive arrangements both reflect the openness and vitality that are the defining characteristics of the U.S. and project an image of strength and confidence consonant with the leader of the free world and the globe's only superpower. The security architecture around the White House is thus a critical element of the building's symbolic function. By flinching in the face of terrorism and imposing unnecessarily disruptive protective measures, the U.S. risks presenting an undesirable and unwanted image. Accordingly, the fundamental challenge we face is how to achieve an equitable balance between these equally critical requirements, while simultaneously minimizing public disruption and inconvenience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

When President Clinton leaves office next January, he will be able to claim credit for having done more than any other president to ensure that America is prepared to counter the threat of terrorism. During his two administrations, overall spending on countering and defending against terrorism doubled. The budgets of key, individual agencies charged with this mission increased exponentially. Three seminal Presidential Decision Directives redefined departmental responsibilities and provided greater coordination of governmental efforts in this area. And, most critically, terrorism was elevated to the very top of the list of security threats that the U.S. will have to face in the 21st Century.

Yet another legacy of the Clinton administration's ambitious counterterrorist efforts, however, is the arguably more controversial presidential decision implemented in May 1995 to close the portion of Pennsylvania Avenue immediately in front of the White House.¹ This unprecedented step was taken at the behest of the U.S. Secret Service (USSS), which had concluded that it would be impossible to protect the White House from a large truck bomb if the street in front of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue remained open. Only five weeks before a massive truck bomb had exploded outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal office building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 persons and injuring hundreds of others. The parallels drawn between the Murrah Building blast and the potential for a similar incident in front of the White House were reportedly instrumental in the President's decision to finally accede to the Secret Service's repeated entreaties to bar all traffic traveling on Pennsylvania Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets.²

¹In addition to the closure of this section of Pennsylvania Avenue to the north of the White House, all west-bound traffic on E Street, to the south of the Executive Mansion, around Ellipse, was also prohibited.

²Interviews and discussions conducted by the project research staff with various Federal law enforcement officials involved with the 1994/95 security reviews of White House security as well as with two members of the commission that had been convened to advise the Treasury Department on the Pennsylvania Avenue on this issue, Washington, D.C., May and June 2000.

Five years on, the truncation of this vital cross-town artery, linking the western and eastern parts of the city, has continued to disrupt traffic and commuting patterns, adversely affected local businesses, and hampered access to the newly revitalized downtown city center. The closure, moreover, has not only created inconvenience and led to revenue loss, but is also seen to project an image of fortification and security that is at once both undesirable and inappropriate given the open and democratic society that is the defining characteristic of our nation.³ Perhaps most disquieting is that a decision which was implemented in response to a specific event (e.g., the Murrah building bombing), and that was necessarily influenced by then-existent security and technological limitations, has since that time evolved into an established *fait accompli*—imposed without any subsequent evaluation, discussion or consideration. In retrospect, it appears that yet another unfortunate consequence of the 1995 decision was that no formal process was either identified or established that could take into account any additional protective measures, strengthened counterterrorist policies, new security approaches or improved technologies that have since emerged and may thus be of considerable relevance today in defending against the threat posed by a truck bomb to the White House. Moreover, given the aforementioned forward thinking and dynamic responses to the terrorist threat that have characterized the Clinton administration's overall approach to this particular challenge, it is somewhat bewildering that the same dynamism and innovation has not been applied to the most basic security decisions directly affecting the White House. To the contrary, the issue of physical security in and around the Executive Mansion appears to have

³See Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Resolved: A National Conversation on Terrorism is in Order," Transcript of a speech delivered at GSA Design Award Ceremony, The Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, March 25, 1999; and, U.S. General Services Administration and U.S. Department of State in cooperation with the American Institute of Architects, *Balancing Security and Openness: A Thematic Summary of a Symposium on Security and the Design of Public Buildings, November 30, 1999* (General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service, Washington, D.C., 2000), *passim*. See also, Benjamin Forgey, "A Capital Under Security's Siege: Sen. Moynihan Calls for 'National Conversation,'" *The Washington Post*, April 15, 1999.

been treated in a way that is both static and one dimensional: based on a decision that has arguably been inappropriately frozen in time and that addresses only one subset (e.g., truck bombs) within a specific category (e.g. bomb attacks) of threats to the President.

ORGANIZATION AND METHODOLOGY

In light of the above, RAND was asked to examine the question of whether Pennsylvania Avenue could be opened while still providing the requisite level of security needed to mitigate the threat to the life of the President from a truck bomb. This report, accordingly, seeks to identify what range of measures might be considered to offset that threat while at the same time preserving to the greatest extent possible normal traffic patterns and daily life in the city. Our research approach was conceived not only to illuminate the disruption, inconvenience and adverse effects that the closure of Pennsylvania Avenue has caused but also to better appreciate the broad challenges faced by federal law enforcement in defending Washington, D.C. against terrorist attack and specifically by the U.S. Secret Service in protecting the President and his family within the confines of the Executive Mansion. Five key questions guided our research. They were:

1. What were the primary factors that influenced the decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue in 1995 to vehicular traffic?
2. Having taken the decision to close down Pennsylvania Avenue, was any thought given to assessing how long the Avenue should stay closed (e.g., was the decision regarded as a permanent solution)?
3. In looking to the future, have any alternatives recently been examined other than the complete closure of Pennsylvania Avenue?
4. Broadening the focus from the White House to external physical security in general, have the responses of other major capital cities faced with serious terrorist threats been examined?
5. In terms of threat perception, what is the greatest type of danger posed by terrorists in Washington, D.C. today?

We were also interested to learn how other capital cities that have experienced sustained terrorism threats and serious incidents of

violence have coped with this challenge. We thus sought to derive any applicable lessons, technologies and approaches to security and countering terrorism that might be relevant to the District of Columbia from the experiences of cities such as London and Paris.

Our methodology included a detailed literature search and in-depth interviews of select former and serving federal law enforcement officials with particular knowledge and experience of Washington, D.C.-area related security issues, members of the aforementioned commission convened by the Treasury Department in 1994-1995 to assess White House security, and other informed persons concerned with this issue. A copy of the survey instrument designed for the project may be found at Appendix I.

One caveat should be noted. At the risk of stating the obvious, we learned in the course of our research that the issue of security and protection against terrorist attack in the nation's capital in general and the White House in particular is a highly sensitive, if not, emotionally-charged subject. While some federal law enforcement agencies were helpfully forthcoming and frank in their depiction and explanations of the problem, other key federal agencies declined the opportunity to discuss these issues with the project research staff. Similarly, the security personnel of some foreign embassies in Washington were themselves reluctant to meet with us or even to discuss the policies and procedures in force around the official residences and most important landmarks in their own nations' capitals for fear of compromising otherwise good relations with their American counterparts.

The report is organized in six sections in addition to this Introduction. The second section provides an historical overview of security in and around the White House and examines the events leading up to the decision taken in 1995 to close Pennsylvania Avenue. It also considers that decision within the context of contemporary terrorism trends, both domestic and international, and how they have affected perceptions of threat and vulnerability. Section three examines the principal issues surrounding this challenge and identifies law enforcement and security concerns. It assesses these concerns within the context of potentially promising alternatives to the Avenue's

continued closure that have emerged since the 1995 decision. Section four focuses on the security measures in force around landmarks and heads-of-state residences in foreign capital cities and considers their relevance to this country. Finally, a concluding section presents our findings and recommendations.

2. THE DECISION TO CLOSE PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SECURITY AT THE WHITE HOUSE, 1800 TO 2000

Acts of terrorism are not a new threat to Washington, D.C. Over the last two centuries, there have been several organized terrorist attacks, as well as numerous attacks by unstable individuals acting alone, targeted at either the President of the United States or U.S. Congressman within the city limits of the District of Columbia. However, it was not until the 1980s that such attacks first evoked heightened security around the White House and the U.S. Capitol and set in motion a process that, following three specific incidents involving the Executive Mansion in 1994, culminated in the decision the following year to close Pennsylvania Avenue. Ironically, even this extreme security measure would have had little effect in either preventing or deterring the three 1994 incidents, much less any similar, subsequent attacks. Accordingly, it has primarily been international and domestic terrorist attacks that have occurred *outside* the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area—and, to some extent, outside the U.S. as well—which have been the dominant influence on the security measures in force in and around the White House today. This section examines the various physical security measures that have been taken to protect the White House Complex throughout its 200 year existence, with a particular focus on those measures that have been imposed in recent years because of heightened fears and concerns about terrorism.

SECURITY AT THE WHITE HOUSE: THE FIRST 183 YEARS

For most of the White House's 200 year-old existence,⁴ U.S. presidents embraced the Jeffersonian principle of maintaining the Executive Mansion as the "People's House": that is, keeping it as open and accessible to the public as possible. Indeed, until as recently as the first part of the twentieth century, presidents and their wives

⁴Building of the original White House commenced in 1792. It was first occupied by President and Mrs. John Adams in 1800. The present structure was completely re-built in 1818, following its destruction four years earlier by British troops, during the War of 1812.

would regularly greet visitors briefly during the lunch hour. President Jefferson himself granted almost unfettered access to the White House, imposing restrictions only early in the morning, while he was asleep, or when he was out of town. Although three presidents fell victim to assassins during the nineteenth century—Lincoln (1865), Garfield (1881), and Harrison (1885)—of which two occurred in Washington, D.C. (Lincoln and Garfield), access to the White House was only first curtailed during the Spanish-American War.

The public enjoyed even freer rein on the White House grounds. The White House gardens provided an unobstructed view of the Potomac River, and were considered a prime tourist attraction in the early part of the nineteenth century. Admission to the grounds was only regulated by a series of walls and fences that were constructed over a period of time beginning during President Jefferson's tenure in the White House. Eventually guards were employed to manage the flow of visitors to the grounds. It was only during World War II, however, that the public admittance to the White House grounds during day-light hours was finally abolished.

Although access to the White House and its grounds was more liberal in the past, this is not to imply that there was a complete lack of security measures within and around the perimeter of the White House Complex. President Jefferson ordered the construction of a high stone wall to replace the temporary rail-fence that then surrounded the White House grounds. A portion of the northern wall blocked the view of the Executive Mansion from present-day Lafayette Park, leading to President Monroe to replace the stone wall with a curving iron fence. An iron fence was also constructed on the west and east sides of the White House as well. In addition to the iron fences, President Monroe had gates installed with heavy locks.

Accordingly, up until 1835, the iron fence would remain the most visible and only physical structure for security. This changed, however, in January 1835 when a man identified as Richard Lawrence fired two pistols at President Andrew Jackson as the president attended funeral services for Representative Warren R. Davis in the House Chamber of the U.S. Capitol. Jackson was not harmed as both pistols misfired.

Nonetheless, as a result of the assassination attempt, a wooden "watch box" for a sentry was installed on the south grounds at the gate to the President's garden.⁵

Until the early part of the twentieth century, security for the president consisted mainly of guards in civilian dress, recruited from the marshal of the District of Columbia. During special events or when the public was invited to the White House, the number of guards would increase. In addition to the guards, a doorkeeper was assigned to maintain watch in the entrance hall. While not armed, the doorkeeper always had firearms close at hand. Not all Presidents approved of the guard system. Both Presidents Adams and Jackson were against it, while President Monroe required it. However, it was not until 1842 when—under the Tyler Administration—a permanent company of guards to protect the President and the White House Complex was established. Two events prompted this decision. In 1841, an intoxicated individual entered the White House grounds and threw stones at the President as he walked along the South Grounds. This was probably the closest a President has come to being physically harmed while on White House grounds. In 1842, an enraged and intoxicated Whig mob, protesting President Tyler's veto of a bill to create the Second Bank of the United States, gathered outside the White House's locked gates, throwing stones, firing guns and burning the President in effigy.

Nonetheless, physical security measures remained largely unchanged until World War II, except in times of war. During the Civil War, troops took up positions in the Mansion until the District of Columbia was determined to be sufficiently fortified; however no additional physical barriers were constructed. In 1942, after the United States had officially entered World War II, guardhouses were placed at regular intervals both inside and outside the fence and were manned by a special detachment of Military Police. Also, armed sentries stood watch around the clock on the White House roof; they continued this rooftop surveillance until being assigned elsewhere toward the end of the war.

⁵Department of the Treasury, *Public Report of the White House Security Review* (Washington, D.C.; Government Printing Office, 1995).

Whatever physical security measures remained in place after the war were designed mostly to prevent forcible ground intrusions from lone individuals and/or by assassins. But even the November 1950 attempt on the life of President Truman at the Blair House by Puerto Rican nationalists did not result in increased physical security measures at the White House. It was reasoned that having President Truman reside in the Blair House while renovations were being completed at the White House had in fact actually amplified the security risk to the President. The Blair House offered, by its architectural design and placement, a limited-security environment. It was separated from the sidewalk by five feet of front lawn, a shoulder-high wrought-iron fence, and a low hedge, as opposed to the White House which had over 60 yards of front lawn, a twelve-foot high fence, and numerous sentry posts.⁶ The actual physical threat posed to the president, accordingly, was deemed to have receded when he and his family moved back into the comparatively more secure White House.

Although, as we have seen, there have been some violent incidents on the perimeter of the White House grounds over the past one hundred fifty years, it is only over the last fifty years—and particularly over the last 26 years—that attempts to enter the White House Complex forcibly have occurred both more frequently and have tended to be of a more violent nature. These intrusions have come from the ground, as well as from the air—and, depending on the severity, some have prompted increased physical security measures. In February 1974, Private Robert Preston, a U.S. Army helicopter mechanic, stole a military helicopter from Fort Meade, Maryland and flew it over the Executive Mansion. He then proceeded to hover over the South Lawn of the White House and touched down briefly approximately 150 feet from the West Wing before flying away. Preston returned a short time later, when he was forced to land by the Executive Protection Agency in a hail of shotgun and submachine gunfire.⁷

⁶Elbert B. Smith, "Shoot-Out on Pennsylvania Avenue," *American History*, May/June 1998, <http://the historynet.com>.

⁷The New York Times, 17 February 1974, p.1, 6.

On Christmas Day of the same year, a man named Marshall Fields, dressed in Arab clothing and claiming to be both the Messiah and laden with explosives, crashed his car through the Northwest Gate of the White House Complex and drove up to the North Portico, several feet from the White House front door. Following a four hour stand-off, he surrendered. The alleged explosives strapped to Fields turned out to be ordinary flares.⁸ In both the above instances, President Nixon and the first family were not at home.

Despite Secret Service spokesman George Cosper's comments that White House security measures were adequate, the Secret Service conducted a security review following these two events, and in 1976 the nineteenth century wrought-iron gates were replaced with more formidable, reinforced gates. The same year that the new gates were installed, Stephen B. Williams attempted unsuccessfully to ram through the new Northwest Gate in his pick-up truck. Unlike the truck, the gates did not buckle.

Although these attempts to penetrate the White House grounds or immediate surrounding areas were indeed of the violent nature and may also have had the deliberate intention of causing the President harm, none was considered indicative of a trend to carry out large-scale attacks, i.e. detonating truck bombs, against the White House Complex with the goal of destroying or severely damaging it; nor did trends in international or domestic terrorism at the time support such concerns.⁹ Accordingly, closing off Pennsylvania Avenue to prevent such attacks did not emerge as a serious security issue until the early 1980s. The only previous, documented, discussions of closing Pennsylvania Avenue occurred during President Kennedy's tenure in office. The motivation for the closure was purely aesthetic. During the Kennedy administration, architects working on a project to preserve buildings along Lafayette Square offered the President and the First Lady the option of turning

⁸The New York Times, 26 December 1974, p.1.

⁹For an assessment of trends in international and domestic terrorism at that time, see Bruce Hoffman, Congressional Testimony, *The World Trade Center Bombing, The Three Mile Island Intrusion and the Potential Threat to Nuclear Power Plants*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, March 1993, CT-106).

the avenue in front of the White House into a pedestrian plaza, with fountains on each end, raised flower beds in the middle and light gray granite as the surface.¹⁰ But the proposal foundered following President Kennedy's assassination in November 1963.¹¹

Until 1983, the security measures that were in place at the White House reflected the types of threats most likely to be encountered at the White House Complex. Over the last two decades, however, a series of incidents both at the White House and outside the District of Columbia, have led to the current closure of the section of Pennsylvania Avenue directly in front of the White House. These incidents have been varying in nature. Some have been international terrorist attacks on American targets overseas, while others have involved direct attacks on the White House or other federal and non-government buildings within the U.S. Most of them have been individual acts of violence, not knowingly tied to larger terrorist movements. Nevertheless, each has resulted in the implementation of increasingly strict security measures to protect the physical structures of the White House Complex.

In 1983, in response to a combination of a series of suicide car and truck bombings by Islamic terrorists against American targets in the Middle East, the explosion of a small bomb outside the Senate Chamber in the U.S. Capitol building, and intelligence reports that pro-Iranian terrorists were planning to attack major U.S. installations, the Secret Service began to put into place an antiterrorist plan, which increased security at the White House Complex. Included among these measures were some permanent alterations to the White House grounds. During the Thanksgiving holiday in 1983, the Secret Service reacted to intelligence reports that pro-Iranian Shiite Muslims were planning a major attack against a U.S. installation by placing trucks filled with sand at most gates to the White House Complex, as well as at the State Department.¹²

¹⁰DeNeen L. Brown, "D.C. Anxious about Impact of Pennsylvania Ave. Closing; Officials Ponder Costs to City, Business, Commuters," *The Washington Post*, May 23, 1995, p. A1.

¹¹John Carl Warnecke, "A Pennsylvania Avenue for the People," *The Washington Post*, August 9, 1998, p. C2.

¹²Special to the New York Times, "White House Security Explained," *The New York Times*, 29 November 1983, p. A21.

Three trucks were parked at the southwest gate, another truck was placed inside the northwest gate, and two more inside gates off of 17th Street leading to the Old Executive Building. A seventh truck was placed on the east side of the building next to the Treasury. Within two weeks of the sand-filled trucks being placed at the entrances of the White House Complex, the Secret Service replaced three of them with concrete walls, known as Jersey Barriers. The sand-filled concrete barriers were installed at the intersection of State Place and West Executive Avenue, an entrance frequently used by foreign visitors, guests and other dignitaries. A similar, small concrete barrier was erected at a park across from the south side of the White House.¹³ As an additional precaution against truck bombs, iron bars which rise out of the ground when the gates are shut were also installed.¹⁴ Original plans did not call for barriers to be placed at the gates on Pennsylvania Avenue; however, the following year masonry piers were placed along the curb on the section of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House.¹⁵

The truck bombings in Beirut of the U.S. Marine barracks in 1983 and the earlier assassination attempt on President Reagan in 1981, also prompted the Secret Service to explore the option of closing Pennsylvania Avenue. The Reagan Administration approached Carl Warnecke, a well-known District of Columbia architect, to design plans for alternative uses of Pennsylvania Avenue. As he had proposed twenty years before to President and Mrs. Kennedy, Warnecke again suggested the creation of a pedestrian plaza in front of the White House alongside the construction of a tunnel under Pennsylvania Avenue for vehicular traffic.¹⁶ Like its predecessor, the scheme once more languished.

In early 1984, the White House further tightened security, implementing security plans that had been under review for almost a year. The increased security was spurred not only by the previous

¹³David Schribman, "Concrete Barriers Installed at White House Gate," *The New York Times*, December 4, 1983, p. A31.

¹⁴Phil Gailey, "Access to White House Is Impeded By Dump Trucks In Security Move," *The New York Times*, pp. A1& 24.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 31; Stephen C. Fehr, "The Avenue: Architects Envision a Pedestrian Plaza," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1995, p. A1.

¹⁶Brown & Torry, "D.C. Anxious About Impact of Pennsylvania Ave. Closing," May 22, 1995.

year's terrorist bombings in the Middle East, but also by the shooting of an armed man outside the White House by a Secret Service agent. Accordingly, from this time forward guards with bomb-sniffing dogs checked each car entering the White House Complex for explosives. Media and visitor access to the Executive Mansion was now restricted to two gates, where those entering were checked with magnetometers for concealed weapons. Previously, those entering the White House had only to present their credentials or visitors' permits.¹⁷

From the time that the Reagan Administration implemented its anti-terrorist security measures in the 1980s to fortify White House security until the mid-1990s, only slight modification had been made to the overall White House Complex security. Additional concrete barriers or masonry piers were placed around the entire White House Complex and advanced electronic sensors were installed around the perimeter; surveillance from the White House rooftop also has increased. Hence, until the most recent changes, no further modifications were deemed necessary and these measures were considered sufficient both to ensure the safety of the president and the security of the Executive Mansion.¹⁸ The basic security architecture and measures around the White House thus remained essentially unchanged for the remainder of the 1980s and into early 1990s.

SECURITY AT THE WHITE HOUSE: THE PAST SEVEN YEARS

Even before the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995, which prompted the most significant changes in the name of security to the White House and its environs in the nation's history, the Secret Service reportedly had wanted to close the portion of Pennsylvania Avenue immediately in front of the Executive Mansion. Three unrelated incidents that had occurred in the Fall and Winter of 1994, had provided the main, initial arguments in favor of closure.¹⁹ The first incident occurred in

¹⁷Reuters, "New Security Steps Being Taken At White House After Shooting," *The New York Times*, March 17, 184, p. A12.

¹⁸Stephen C. Fehr, "Architects Envision A Pedestrian Plaza," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1995.

¹⁹Discussions with Judge William H. Webster (June 8, 2000) and William T. Coleman, a former Secretary of Transportation (June 2, 2000). Additional discussions with Gary Burch, former Chief of Engineer for the

September, when a 38 year old man, with a history of alcohol and substance abuse, stole a private, light aircraft from a small airport in Maryland and intentionally crashed it into the White House. Although no one was harmed or injured (except the plane's pilot, who died in what is thought to have been a deliberate act of suicide), the incident served to highlight the building's vulnerability to a determined—and, as in this case, a suicidal—adversary. The following month, a lone gunmen opened fire on the White House with a semi-automatic assault rifle. Some 29 rounds peppered the north façade of the White House, with one bullet penetrating a window in the Press Briefing Room located in the West Wing. Then, in December, the mansion was struck by bullets fired from somewhere south of the White House grounds.²⁰

Although none of the incidents appear to have been politically-motivated, and therefore cannot be construed as acts of terrorism per se,²¹ and while they caused no serious harm or damage to other persons or the White House, the three incidents nonetheless fed a growing climate of fear and concern over terrorism in the U.S. that had been triggered by the previous year's bombing of New York City's World Trade Center. That attack, which had occurred within weeks of President Clinton's inauguration, sent shock-waves throughout the country. A large bomb, weighing approximately 1,200-lbs. had been constructed from readily available commercial ingredients (in this instance, urea and nitric acid—whose explosive power was in turn further enhanced by three metal cylinders of compressed hydrogen gas),²² killed six persons and injured over a thousand others. The casualty toll doubtless would have been far greater had the terrorists responsible for the blast succeeded in their intention of toppling one of the twin towers onto the other.

The significance of the Trade Center blast, and its impact on the American psyche, cannot be overstated. Until then, terrorism had been

District of Columbia, and Harvey Joyner, both of Parsons Transportation, May 24, 2000.

²⁰For additional details of these incidents, see Appendix II.

²¹Terrorism here is defined by its most salient characteristic as a politically-motivated act of violence.

²²Simon Reeve, *The New Jackals: Ramzi Yousef, Osama bin Laden and the future of terrorism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999), pp. 6-7, & 154

widely perceived by Americans as something that happened elsewhere. Accordingly, however frequently U.S. citizens and interests were the target of terrorists abroad, many Americans nonetheless believed that the United States itself was somehow immune to such violence within its own borders. The Trade Center bombing shattered that facade of complacency and began to influence thinking about the security of a broad range of potential targets across the U.S.—and in Washington, D.C. in particular—as no previous terrorist incident had. Indeed, despite a somewhat malignant domestic history of attacks on American presidents—one in four have been the target of assassination²³—it was only in the aftermath of this incident, with the additional impetus provided by both the aforementioned aircraft crash and the two shootings, that the extraordinary security measures in force around the White House today began to take shape.

As a result of all these incidents, a commission was established to review the security needs at the White House Complex and advise the Treasury Department on a variety of issues—including whether Pennsylvania Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets should be closed. The commission, comprised of experts from outside the government, was directed by former Treasury Secretary Bentsen²⁴ to examine and evaluate all aspects of the facts surrounding the aircraft crash in September 1994; the security procedures in and around the White House Complex then in force; the White House Complex's vulnerability to air and ground attacks; and, the utilization of state-of-the-art technologies to enhance protection from such assaults. It was also charged with finding a means with which to balance the "need to keep the White House as open and accessible to the public as possible consistent with valid security

²³According to Franklin L. Ford's seminal work, *Political Murder: From Tyrannicide to Terrorism* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985), nine presidents have been the victims of attack by assassins (one of them twice), as well as one president-elect and three presidential candidates." See p. 355.

²⁴Both the then-Undersecretary of the Treasury for Enforcement, Ronald K. Noble, and then-Secret Service (USSS) Director, Eljay B. Bowman, however, appear to have been the key Treasury Department players on the commission.

needs"—specifically in terms of closing or maintaining vehicular access to Pennsylvania Avenue.²⁵

After eight months of study, the commission recommended that the section of Pennsylvania Avenue which ran directly in front of the White House should be closed to all vehicular traffic and made into a pedestrian zone on the grounds that the President and Executive Mansion could not otherwise be protected from a large truck bomb explosion.²⁶ The recommendation of the panel, after consultations with the White House Administration, was approved by Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and eventually put into effect on May 19, 1995.²⁷ The initial steps taken to implement this decision were the placement of barriers on the northwest and northeast intersections of Pennsylvania Avenue and 15th and 17th Streets. These barriers would eventually be replaced with guardhouses, automatic, underground metal barriers, which could be raised and lowered, and large concrete planters.

Initially, the White House rejected the commission's findings, fearing they would send an undesirably symbolic message of closure of government and separation of the president from the people. This assessment changed, however, following the aforementioned April 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building in Oklahoma City. Upon closer examination, however, the explosion at the Murrah building has less relevance to the threat of a truck bomb attack directed against the White House than is commonly assumed. In the first place, the vehicle containing the estimated 1,200-lb. bomb had been parked in an indented passenger loading zone and thus was only about nine feet away from the

²⁵U.S. Treasury Department Memorandum, "Department of Treasury's White House Review," May 1, 1995.

²⁶See the statement of Mr. Jim Johnson, Assistant Treasury Secretary for Enforcement quoted in Stephen C. Fehr, & Alice Reid, "No Avenue for Escape, U.S. Agrees Pennsylvania's close is Damaging Downtown," *The Washington Post*, June 7, 1996. See also, Roger Lewis, "Shaping the City - Reopening Pennsylvania Avenue: Time to Take Down the Barriers," *The Washington Post*, October 4, 1997; John M. Goshko and Scott Bowles, "New Security Measures Ordered By President: Federal Facilities To Get Stricter Controls," *The Washington Post*, June 29, 1995, p. A1; Stephen C. Fehr & Hamil R. Harris, "No Miracle on H Street: Morning's a Breeze, but Avenue Closing Jams Evening Rush Hour," *The Washington Post*, May 23, 1995, p. A1; and, idem., "Conversion To Be Delayed A Week," *The Washington Post*, June 14, 1995, p. B3.

²⁷Treasury Order 110-09, May 19, 1995.

center of the north side of the Murrah building when the blast occurred. By comparison, the White House is set some 350 ft. back from the south curb of Pennsylvania Avenue: a distance more than thirty five times greater from where the Murrah building truck bomb was situated. Second, apparently by sheer chance, the explosion itself occurred very close to one of the Murrah building's four main support columns. The explosive force thus initiated a chain reaction, whereby each of the two story columns toppled over in succession, thereby collapsing the entire north façade of the office building and causing each of its nine floors to crash downward onto one another.²⁸ The White House, however, is built on only three levels and has a low set, "box-type" geometrical configuration built around a framed steel structure. These two characteristics not only minimize the danger of successive floor collapse but help ensure that if any explosive damage does occur to the mansion, it will be localized as opposed to catastrophic.²⁹

Notwithstanding the above considerations, and the fundamental differences between the Murrah building blast and any potentially similar attack on Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House, the incident apparently still served to re-focus President Clinton's attention on Secret Service assessments that the only way to protect the White House from an attack of this kind was simply to eliminate all vehicular traffic from the street facing the Executive Mansion.³⁰ Had the Oklahoma City bombing not occurred, it is by no means clear whether President Clinton would in fact have ultimately acceded to the recommendation to close Pennsylvania Avenue, an option that he had consistently previously rejected. Thus, effective Saturday morning, May

²⁸Tony Moore, "Buildings and Bombs!" *Intersec: The Journal of International Security*, vol. 10, issue 5, May 2000, p. 168. See also, "Explosion in Oklahoma City," *The Washington Post*, April 20, 1995.

²⁹See National Research Council (NRC), *Protecting Buildings from Bomb Damage* (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1985), p. 56; C. L. Elliot, "The Defense of Buildings Against Terrorism and Disorder. A Design Philosophy for the Construction of Ordinary Buildings and Installations to Resist Terrorism and Public Disorder," University of Southampton (England): Unpublished M. Phil. thesis, 1986, p. 505; and, Roger Lewis, "Shaping the City - Reopening Pennsylvania Avenue: Time to Take Down the Barriers," *The Washington Post*, October 4, 1997, p. F1.

³⁰Stephen Labaton, "Security Plan: Close Pennsylvania Avenue," *The New York Times*, May 10, 1995, p. A10.

20, 1995, Pennsylvania Avenue was henceforth closed to all vehicular traffic between 15th and 17th Streets.³¹

THE TERRORIST THREAT TODAY: PERCEPTION VERSUS REALITY

In the immediate aftermath of the shock and horror that the Murrah building blast generated, it is understandable how compelling the need for expeditious, even excessive, security measures were regarded by the President and those responsible for his safety. Given the intense enmity against the U.S. federal government that is believed to have fueled the attack and the ruthlessness inherent in an incident that claimed the lives of 19 children in the day-care center immediately above the explosive-laden vehicle, fears of follow-on and/or copycat attacks against a range of potential government targets—including the White House and even the President himself—could not at the time be prudently discounted. However, in the five years since the Oklahoma City bombing the immediacy that required so extreme a measure is no longer as readily apparent nor as clearly explicated by either security or law enforcement officials.

First, the anti-federalist, white supremacist revolution that the Murrah building bomber, Timothy McVeigh, and his identified confederates hoped both to inspire and provoke has yet to materialize. While the seditious motivations that lay behind the attack doubtless still exist in parts of the U.S., they nonetheless have not gained the widespread currency and popularity that at the time was perhaps feared. In this respect, the wave of domestic terrorism and violence that many worried would break across the country in the wake of that tragic event has not

³¹Treasury Order 110-09, May 19, 1995. The decision was communicated to the District of Columbia government only the previous evening. Moreover, in addition to closing Pennsylvania Avenue, it was decided that all west bound traffic on E Street and Madison Place to the east of Lafayette Park should be similarly eliminated. Discussion with a former senior official in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) responsible for counterterrorism, May 30, 2000. Similar views were also expressed by currently serving FBI officials. Discussion, Washington, D.C., June 2000. See also, Fehr, & Reid, "No Avenue for Escape, U.S. Agrees Pennsylvania's close is Damaging Downtown," June 7, 1996; and Jackson-Han, "Security Fears Force Closure of Pennsylvania Avenue Near White House," May 20, 1995.

come to pass. In fact, according to FBI statistics, far fewer terrorist incidents were recorded in the U.S. during the 1990s, than during the previous decade. The FBI lists a total of 220 domestic terrorist acts as having been perpetrated between 1980 and 1989; compared to a mere 29 incidents for the period 1990 to 1998 (the last year for which published data is available from the FBI). Admittedly, 176 persons were killed by terrorists in the U.S. during the 1990s: a figure nearly seven times the 1980s total of just 26 persons. However, this tragic death toll is the result of four out of only 29 terrorist incidents: and of the four incidents, it was one especially heinous act—the Murrah building bombing—which accounts for the overwhelming majority—e.g., 95 percent—of the total.³²

There is of course no doubt that terrorism remains a threat to the lives and well-being of Americans in our own country, but it must kept in mind that the actual number of terrorist incidents—as opposed to the hundreds of hoaxes, often involving alleged chemical and biological agents, that the FBI and other law enforcement and public safety agencies now routinely respond to and which arguably have fueled our perception of a burgeoning domestic terrorist—remains remarkably few and those that cause fatalities still less.³³ In this respect, it is

³²Statistics compiled from Terrorist Research and Analytical Center, Terrorism Section, Criminal Investigative Division, *FBI Analysis Of Terrorist Incidents In The United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1984), p. 10; idem., *Terrorism in the United States, 1982-1992* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1993), p. 8; Counterterrorism Threat Assessment and Warning Unit, National Security Division, *Terrorism in the United States 1997* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1998), pp. 22-23; and, idem., *Terrorism in the United States 1998* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000), pp. 3 & 6.

³³See Statement for the record before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 28, 1998, <http://www.fbi.gov/pressrm/congress/congress98/threats.htm> of FBI Director Louis J. Freeh, p. 6; Statement of Robert J. Burnham, Chief, Domestic Terrorism Section before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, May 19, 1999, p.1 at <http://www.fbi.gov/pressrm/congress/congress99/epa.htm>; and, Statement for the Record of Mrs. Barbara J. Martinez, Deputy Director, National Domestic Preparedness Office before the U.S. House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee,

difficult to refute the observation made recently by two independent, Washington, D.C.-based security consultants, both of whom come from long careers in the American intelligence and counterterrorism communities,³⁴ that while the Oklahoma City incident note, "was the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil . . . so far it has proved to be an isolated incident."³⁵

Nor is the situation terribly different so far as terrorist targeting of American citizens and interests overseas is concerned. In recent years, the existence of a "new terrorism," far more lethal and bloody than before, has been cited in light of the massive truck bombings in 1998 of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania by individuals affiliated with the renegade Saudi terrorist figure, Osama bin Laden; the 1996 blast at a U.S. Air Force's Khobar barracks in Saudi Arabia; in the 1995 sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway by an apocalyptic Japanese religious sect; and in a number of other deadly incidents perpetrated by religion-inspired terrorists. Indeed, these developments have been described by some analysts as unmistakable harbingers of a profound and potentially catastrophic change in the nature of terrorism today.³⁶ Yet, despite the appearance of these new adversaries, their activities have yet to produce either the anticipated changes in terrorist weaponry and tactics or indeed the world-wide surge in terrorism that were predicted to occur, especially so far as the U.S. (the "new terrorism's" principal alleged nemesis) is concerned.³⁷

Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Emergency Management, June 9, 1999, p.1 at <http://www.fbi.gov/pressrm/congress/congress99/comterr.htm>.

³⁴Milt Bearden is a former CIA station chief in Pakistan and the Sudan; and Larry Johnson is a former CIA analyst and deputy director of the State Department's Counter-Terrorism Office during the Bush and Clinton administrations.

³⁵Milt Bearden & Larry Johnson, "Don't Exaggerate the Terrorist Threat," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 15, 2000.

³⁶See, among other publications, for example, Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, "America and the New Terrorism," *Survival*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 59-75 and, Ian Lesser, et al., *Countering the New Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, MR-989-AF, 1999), *passim*.

³⁷See, for example, former CIA director John Deutch's predication in 1995 about an impending world-wide increase in terrorism. "I regret that I have come to the conclusion," Deutch told the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee, "there is going to be tremendous

During the 1990s, for example, a total of 87 Americans were killed in 40 attacks perpetrated against U.S. targets overseas. By contrast, approximately six times as many Americans (571) perished in the 69 attacks recorded during the 1980s.³⁸

Once again, there is no doubt that terrorism remains a threat to Americans traveling or working abroad and whatever the number of killed and injured overseas it is incontestably tragic that any American should lose his or her life to violence or be wantonly harmed and injured simply because of the nationality of the passport they carry, the uniform they wear, or the job that they perform. But the fact remains that, so far as international terrorism is concerned, the world was a far more dangerous place for Americans in the 1980s, when on average eight Americans were killed per attack, than during the 1990s when the supposedly more lethal "new terrorism" on average claimed the lives of just two persons.

Given the above perspectives, one must therefore ask why Americans and their leaders now generally feel so profound a sense of risk and endangerment when fewer terrorist incidents occur in the U.S. today than during the 1980s and when more Americans were indisputably killed overseas in the 1980s than in the 1990s? The answer perhaps lies less in empirical evidence than in changes governing our perception of the terrorist threat.³⁹ In this respect, despite data and arguments to the contrary, the more salient perception in the U.S. today is undeniably that the terrorist threat is both increasing and worsening. Nor is this perception by Americans of escalating violence confined to terrorism

growth in terrorism over the next decade or so, not only directed towards but throughout the world." Quoted in Reuters, "CIA boss predicts huge surge in world terrorism," *The Times* (London), December 20, 1995.

³⁸Statistics compiled by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. State Department. See also, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1999* (Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of State Publication 10687, April 2000), p. 1.

³⁹For a more detailed discussion of the disconnection between perception and fears of terrorism and the actual threat, see Bruce Hoffman, "America and the New Terrorism: The American Perspective," *Survival*, vol. 42, no. 2 (Summer 2000), pp. 161-166. A similar argument is also made in Bearden and Johnson, "Don't Exaggerate the Terrorist Threat," June 15, 2000.

alone. According to University of Southern California sociologist Barry Glassner, identical attitudes are evident with respect to ordinary (e.g., non-political or apolitical) violent crime. He cites the fact that concern about the prevalence of homicide in America increased significantly throughout the 1990s despite the fact that the nation's murder rate actually fell by 20 percent between 1990 and 1998. One explanation he offers is the intense media attention focused on this issue, as evidenced by the fact that the number of murder stories on network news (excluding coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial) increased during the same period by 600 percent despite the falling homicide rate.⁴⁰ A similar parallel may at least be inferentially drawn between increased media coverage of both terrorism and the plethora of terrorist hoaxes previously cited, to a more widespread and heightened perception among Americans of a growing terrorism threat. As Brian Jenkins, one of the country's foremost experts on terrorism, notes, "Mentions of Sarin and anthrax in the press increased twenty-fold during the 1990s and, not surprisingly, we have suffered a spate of anthrax hoaxes. Hoaxes involving the threatened or alleged use of chemical or biological substances [however] will remain our most common problem."⁴¹

Security expert Gavin de Becker has similarly warned how, "Unwarranted fear is fear created by imagination. The media plays up unwarranted fear with sensational, graphic reports about catastrophic dangers and personal violence that do not represent a statistically accurate picture of the risks in everyday life."⁴² In this respect, by succumbing to these intense fears, we risk implementing sweeping policies and making hard security choices (that also subsequently prove difficult to reverse) based on misperception and misunderstanding rather than on hard analysis built on empirical evidence. We perhaps also neglect to realize that the U.S. is not powerless in the face of threats

⁴⁰Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. xxi.

⁴¹Testimony of Brian Michael Jenkins before the Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans Affairs, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives,

"Combating Terrorism: Assessing the Threat," 20 October 1999, p. 3.

⁴²Summarized in GSA, *Balancing Security and Openness*, p. 5.

such as terrorism and that improvements in intelligence, advances in counterterrorist technologies, and the development of new policies and more sophisticated countermeasures may provide us with new approaches and solutions to security problems that can both obviate and supersede the need for anachronistically cumbersome or highly intrusive measures previously adopted. Indeed, it is to this issue that we turn our attention in the next section.

3. MAINTAINING SECURITY ALONG PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE: AN EXAMINATION OF OPTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES TO THE AVENUE'S CONTINUED CLOSURE

The decision taken in 1995 to close the section of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House was regarded as permanent. From discussions and interviews with two members of the commission convened to advise the Treasury Department to examine White House security, former and currently serving federal law enforcement officers, and the recollection of the former Chief Engineer for District of Columbia, no consideration seems to have been given to establishing a process by which the decision subsequently could be reviewed and reassessed in light of either new developments—whether pertaining to changing terrorism trends or the advent of new technologies or more sophisticated countermeasures—or otherwise on any regularly established, periodic basis.⁴³ In retrospect, this appears to have been one of the main drawbacks with the decision-making process that surrounded the 1995 closure of Pennsylvania Avenue: not least because of arguments now used to justify the decision which go well beyond public statements suggesting the move was driven exclusively to assure the safety of the President and his family from cataclysmic truck bomb attacks.

Moreover, in the five years since the decision was taken, it has been argued that federal law enforcement authorities have progressively "moved the goal posts" from the specific priority of executive protection to embrace broader security goals: a move, some suggest, that is designed to ensure that the 1995 decision will not be re-visited.⁴⁴ Through this action, which does not appear to have involved the independent, outside consultation and evaluation along the lines of the 1994/95 advisory commission, an almost "sacred precinct" of security, it is argued, has unilaterally been created around the White House unlike that in force at any other federal government building or historic

⁴³Interviews and discussions carried out by the project research staff during May and June 2000.

⁴⁴Discussion with Federal City Council officials and a member of the Pennsylvania Avenue Task Force, Washington, D.C., June 27, 2000.

landmark—including, for example, the U.S. Capitol building and U.S. Supreme Court.⁴⁵

Indeed, during the course of our research it became apparent that protection of the White House's facade from even minimal or cosmetic damage has become as much a factor in Pennsylvania Avenue's continued closure as the originally cited rationale of ensuring the safety of the president and his family. This section of the report, accordingly, revisits the rationale behind both the original decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue, and considers the arguments for its continued closure. It then examines an alternative security architecture, embracing a variety of specific options, that could possibly prove as effective as the current policy and in addition may offer added protective measures for the White House that might not have previously existed five years ago when the closure decision was implemented.

THE ARGUMENTS FOR CONTINUED CLOSURE—AN OVERVIEW

Both the former and currently serving federal law enforcement officials with whom we spoke strongly oppose the re-opening of Pennsylvania Avenue.⁴⁶ To their minds, it is neither necessary nor judicious to even consider reversing this decision. Typical of their dismissal of any discussion about re-opening the street in front of the White House to traffic was the observation that, most people who live and work in the District have become largely inured to the road's closure, seeing congestion in the downtown area as just one more inconvenience in a city that is already beset by a myriad of intractable traffic problems. Moreover, these officials argue that the public mindset in and around the District of Columbia, given its status as the nation's capital, is far more security-conscious and sensitive than that of any other major American metropolis and that therefore contingencies such as important road closures and obtrusive physical security are largely accepted as entirely reasonable and necessary precautionary

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Interviews and discussions conducted by the RAND project research staff with retired and currently serving FBI agents responsible for counterterrorism either at the national level or for Washington, D.C. specifically, Washington, D.C. May and June 2000.

measures. It was additionally pointed out that due to the inherently transient nature of employment among many of the city's government workers—be they political appointees or individuals serving a designated tour of duty with a governmental agency or at a military base in the District of Columbia—there are doubtless a large number of people who have never known Pennsylvania Avenue as anything but closed. Accordingly, for this section of the population, re-opening the street was described as essentially a "non-issue."⁴⁷

The federal law enforcement personnel with whom we spoke also rejected claims concerning the negative economic impact of closing Pennsylvania Avenue. They argued that because more people are now out on foot in the immediate vicinity of the White House, businesses (at least to their knowledge) are benefiting from an increased volume in pedestrian trade. In the same vein, these officials deny that altered traffic patterns in front of the White House have served to reduce public access to the Executive Mansion, arguing that this historic landmark remains one of the most open, frequently visited and freely roamed executive residences in the world.

Most of their apprehensions and concerns, however, relate to physical security issues above and beyond the President's personal safety and the perceived impact that re-opening Pennsylvania Avenue would have for the safety of the President and security of the White House. Two specific concerns were repeatedly emphasized:

- The structural integrity of the Executive Mansion and the detrimental effects of an attack that inflicted any visible damage whatsoever on so important a national symbol; and,
- That any decision to re-open Pennsylvania Avenue would be tantamount to "waving a red flag" in front of terrorists, in that it would inevitably constitute a provocative act that would likely prompt or invite terrorist attack.

⁴⁷Discussion with FBI officials, Washington Field Office, Washington D.C., May 30, 2000.

With regard to the first issue, the former and currently serving FBI officials with whom we spoke and, from what we could gather either from published discussions of, and anecdotally from persons familiar with, the Secret Service's position,⁴⁸ the claim that the White House offers a high degree of natural protection to a truck bomb (see the more detailed discussion below) is disputed. The standard setback distance now required for American embassies of 30 meters (97.5 feet) is seen as largely irrelevant to the White House because the Executive Mansion, it is claimed, is not reinforced to nearly the same degree as these more modern, often retrofitted and significantly strengthened, overseas diplomatic missions are. For example, since the 1998 embassy bombings in East Africa, many American legations are now protected by extremely strong and resilient blast walls. They maintain that the over pressure and "shock velocity" generated from 1,200-1,800 pounds of homemade explosive,⁴⁹ a perfectly feasible payload that could be concealed in a standard truck or semi-trailer, would be sufficient to collapse the White House completely: so long as the force of the blast was appropriately channeled and directed.⁵⁰ According to Secret Service blast simulations and modeling, a standoff distance of at least 800 feet therefore is required to adequately protect the building from this type of explosive force.⁵¹ It is perhaps not coincidental that this figure

⁴⁸Despite repeated efforts, officials at both the Treasury Department and Secret Service declined, or proved unable, to meet with the RAND research staff.

⁴⁹Home made explosives are seen as representing a greater danger than Semtex or high explosive (HE) for several reasons including; the relative ease of component acquisition, lower cost and greater explosive effectiveness resulting from the crushing/mushrooming (as opposed to the sharp, cutting) shock wave that it generates.

⁵⁰Discussion with former senior FBI official responsible for counterterrorism, May 30, 2000. See also, John W. Ellis, *Police Tactics and Planning for Vehicular Bombing: Prevention, Defense and Response* (Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishers, Ltd, 1999), Chapter 5.

⁵¹Discussion with former senior FBI official responsible for counterterrorism, May 30, 2000. The Department of Defense has gauged the effects of a 2000 lb. blast for a framed house blast. Their analysis shows that even this amount of explosive would cause total destruction at a distance of 200 feet, dropping to 50 percent damage from 275 feet and between 50 percent and 0 percent damage up to 650 feet. Telephone interview with e-mail follow ups with Tom Convery, police explosives expert, Ventura County, June 6, 2000. However, the point is also made

equates exactly to the distances from the front of the White House to the southern curb of H Street/northern boundary of Lafayette Park and from the White House South Portico to the South Street Ellipse: even though the requirement of an 800-ft. setback has never been publicly discussed or otherwise used to justify the 1995 closing of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The above argument, however, begs the issue of whether any alternative security architecture, involving perhaps barrier and enhanced surveillance technologies, could not be found that effectively prevents trucks or other large vehicles transporting bombs of this magnitude first from entering Pennsylvania Avenue and then from proceeding down it towards the front of the White House. In this respect, there should also be some comprehensive examination of whether the 800 foot setback defined by the Secret Service is in fact the absolute minimum distance required to adequately protect the Executive Mansion. Such an assessment should clearly explicate—and justify—the context within which stand-off determinations are gauged, particularly with regard to questions over acceptable and unacceptable levels of building damage. It should also address in this context why such a "sanitized" space is required specifically around the White House, but not around any other federal building or landmark. Moreover, it must address the fact that the rationale put forward initially to justify closing Pennsylvania Avenue was not protecting a "sanitized space" but ensuring the President's safety.

The prospect that the White House could be further strengthened through additional structural reinforcement and retrofit is also similarly dismissed by these officials. Given the sensitive nature of previous architectural and security refinements to the White House and

that structures in dense urban settings are the most vulnerable to destruction since the "buildings on either of the streets confine the blast wave, which increases pressure on the buildings. Because it is confined by the buildings, the pressure of the blast drops more slowly than it would if it had been let off in the open countryside" (Moore, "Buildings and Bombs!" p. 167). Although the White House is of course not located in open countryside, it is equally is not situated on a narrow street, surrounded by the type of urban canyon that would channel and intensify the effects of such a blast.

the severe restrictions imposed on open access to such information, it was impossible for us to assess the veracity of this argument. Clearly, as section two briefly recounted, in recent years the White House itself has been progressively "hardened" through various state-of-the-art physical security and defensive measures. These have likely included (at a minimum) installation of bullet-proof/shatter-proof glass in the windows, strengthened walls and reinforced window frames, and perhaps even bomb blast net curtains (BBNC). However, no independent verification or delineation of these measures could be obtained. In the absence of such information, it is therefore impossible to assess the extent to which the White House is currently capable of withstanding varying sizes and strength of bomb blasts or what additional measures might ensure a suitable level of protection.

Proposals to surround the Executive Mansion with a plexi-glass shield were also rejected by the law enforcement officers with whom we spoke on the grounds that it would not be sufficiently strong to withstand the effects of a major explosive force and would itself become a dangerous anti-personnel weapon in the form of shards of sharpened plastic being turned into deadly pieces of shrapnel. While more formidable (but likely non-transparent) blast barriers of the sort employed outside U.S. embassies could be used, these would have to be built so high in order to ensure that explosive shock waves would "roll" over the White House. They would thereby necessarily obscure the building and detract completely from the White House's symbolic function and purpose and thus negate precisely the openness and accessibility that the re-opening of Pennsylvania Avenue is intended to achieve.

Some of the law enforcement officers with whom we spoke additionally pointed out that a shield or blast wall of this type would doubly compound the explosive impact of any bomb attack on the surrounding neighborhood. Contiguous buildings would not only be hit with the positive force from the primary explosion; they would also be struck by secondary shock waves deflected back from the blast wall. This would result in considerable loss of life among any passersby or sightseers unfortunate enough to be in the vicinity of the White House were such an explosion to occur. The shock waves would almost certainly

also demolish Blair House and many of the other historic buildings lining Madison and Jackson Places as well as the Secret Service and Park Service Police command posts situated on the street. The terrorists responsible for the incident, these officials argue, would thereby enjoy the added benefit of a "picture perfect" backdrop for the inevitable television camera shots of the White House surrounded by untold death and destruction.⁵²

While some concession was made that hardening of the White House's internal structure could conceivably protect the building from the most destructive effects of a major truck bomb, these officials pointed out that this should not be seen as an all-inclusive end in itself. Indeed, given the Executive Mansion's symbolism, as representing the heart of American government and democracy, federal security priorities have already become as much concerned with preventing any damage to the building's façade as ensuring against wholesale collapse. In other words, any physical damage whatsoever inflicted on the building—regardless of whether anyone is harmed or not—has come to be regarded as completely unacceptable. Ensuring that this does not occur has hence become an objective that can only be achieved by eliminating entirely the threat of a vehicular bomb in the vicinity of the White House: which apparently means maintaining the 800-ft. setbacks from the front and back of the White House—thus also keeping Pennsylvania Avenue permanently devoid of all vehicular traffic.⁵³ In this vein, the FBI officials with whom we met, argued that Pennsylvania Avenue should be grassed over completely and permanently converted into a pedestrian thoroughfare as people would then no longer identify the route as a roadway and cease questioning whether or not it should be re-opened.⁵⁴

Over and above questions relating to structural integrity, serious concerns remained that any move to relax existing physical security restrictions around Pennsylvania Avenue would serve as a "red flag" to terrorists, inviting—if not, prompting—an attack against a

⁵²Discussion with FBI agents, Washington Field Office, Washington D.C. May 30, 2000.

⁵³Discussion with Parsons Corporation, Washington D.C., May 24, 2000.

⁵⁴Discussion with FBI agents, Washington D.C. May 30, 2000.

reconstituted "soft target of opportunity." Because the White House represents such an attractive target in terms of American symbolism, rolling back security measures after a vulnerability has already been identified is simply not regarded as a viable option by these officials: especially at a time when the common perception is the threat of terrorism is increasing.⁵⁵ These law enforcement officials argue that events such as the 1996 Khobar barracks bombing in Saudi Arabia and the bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania two years later,⁵⁶ clearly demonstrate that neither the World Trade Center nor the Oklahoma City blasts were aberrations or isolated events, but profound harbingers of heightened, future violence. In this respect, these incidents—all of which, it should be noted, occurred outside of Washington, D.C. and indeed in some cases, outside the U.S. itself—are seen to underscore the omnipresent threat to the White House and further justify the extraordinary security measures—e.g., the closure of Pennsylvania Avenue—in force around it.

However, the "red flag" argument can be used to argue against safety measures that are unique to the White House inasmuch as the latter make the White House an even more attractive target for terrorists because of its aura of invincibility. The use of extraordinary and extreme measures to protect the White House are just as likely to encourage attention from terrorists as discourage it.

These officials are also quick to dismiss any argument concerning the utility and effectiveness of compensatory barrier control measures that might be installed at either end of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the Executive Mansion. Such systems are regarded as insufficient to offset the danger of a vehicular bomb being detonated in front of the

⁵⁵See, for example, the recently released report of the National Commission on Terrorism, *Countering The Changing Threat* (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Terrorism, May 2000), p. iv and *passim*; and the countervailing view specifically addressing the report's main argument expressed in Bearden and Johnson, "Don't Exaggerate the Terrorist Threat," June 15, 2000.

⁵⁶The Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia killed 19 US military personnel, injuring more than 500 (American and Saudi) others. The Kenyan and Tanzanian bombings collectively killed 257, wounding in excess of 5,000.

White House. The ability of automated/flexible pole systems to deter a determined suicide attack involving a fanatically determined terrorist driving a large van or truck in particular is questioned. These officials point out that effectively halting a speeding vehicle with a barrier of this sort would require a massive crossbeam, greatly compounding operational problems of deployment to the extent that it may not be possible to activate the system within the defensive reaction window-of-time needed to stop a speeding vehicle.⁵⁷ However, as the discussion below explains, this is by no means clear and runs counter to the claims of architects and other security design specialists. At minimum, it is an issue that requires further examination and explication before a definitive determination of the effectiveness of a compensatory barrier control system can be made.

Even if a sufficiently strong and maneuverable barrier could be erected, it was also pointed out that terrorists would respond by simply changing the nature of their attack. FBI counterterrorism specialists, for example, maintain that if an enhanced ammonium nitrate/compressed gas cylinder-type device was used, a car bomb attack mounted from Pennsylvania Avenue would be capable of causing considerable damage to the White House, particularly the front of the building where at least some 200 employees work. Officials have also speculated that terrorists may attempt to conceal larger bombs on board tour buses which would be parked nearby in the vicinity of Lafayette Park and then detonated using short-fuse timers. These experts argue that the combined over pressure and shock velocity from a vehicle delivery system of this sort could, potentially, be as great as that generated by a standard truck bomb.⁵⁸ However germane this argument may be, it also evidences how the original justification for the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue—to protect the President's life—has been extended to embrace a far wider set of security concerns alongside an expanding outward radius of security

⁵⁷Discussion with FBI agents, Washington Field Office, Washington D.C. May 30, 2000. See also, Ellis, *Police Tactics and Planning for Vehicular Bombing*, p.203.

⁵⁸Discussion with FBI agents, Washington Field Office, Washington D.C. May 30, 2000.

around the White House that extends beyond even existing 800 foot setback.

The measured opinion of the law enforcement and security community is thus that barrier systems will only work if they are permanently staffed by armed guards prepared to open fire against any suspect vehicle. However, armed guards of course already are stationed in and around the White House (and indeed other federal facilities as well) and presumably are trained and instructed how to respond along precisely these same lines in the event of a suspected attack.

Finally, it is argued that if Pennsylvania Avenue were re-opened, every time a threat to the White House was made, the street would have to be closed down and cleared out, resulting in considerably more chaos and disruption than is engendered by its current, permanent closure. FBI agents responsible for counterterrorism in the Washington, D.C. area argue that on the basis of the three to four daily terrorist warnings they currently receive, such a scenario could be expected to eventuate at least once every month.

However, as the following section explains, a number of potentially promising alternatives or options exist that might still ensure security in and around the White House and provide the required layer of protection surrounding the President when there—but which might also allow for controlled traffic flow along the section of the Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets. Moreover, some of these approaches may neither have existed or been apparent five years ago when the decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue was originally implemented.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST CONTINUED CLOSURE—AN OVERVIEW

Compelling though the above arguments by federal law enforcement officials may be, the opposite case can nonetheless persuasively be made. The White House, according to this view, represents one of America's most recognizable symbols of government, democracy and freedom—which beyond any doubt deserves and requires the utmost protection and security. It is essential, therefore, that the Executive Mansion's defensive arrangements both reflect the openness and vitality that are the defining characteristics of the U.S. and project an image

of strength and confidence consonant with the leader of the free world and the globe's only superpower. The security architecture around the White House is thus a critical element of the building's symbolic function. By flinching in the face of terrorism and imposing unnecessarily disruptive protective measures, the U.S. risks presenting an undesirable and unwanted image. Accordingly, the fundamental challenge we face is how to achieve an equitable balance between these equally critical requirements, while simultaneously minimizing public disruption and inconvenience.

Indeed, one of the main criticisms of the security arrangement currently in force around the White House is the negative symbolic effect and undesirable image that closing down the two blocks of Pennsylvania Avenue has projected both within and outside the country. These critics argue that the 1995 decision reflects a 'bunker mentality' which is completely at odds with the perception of the thoroughly open society that is widely heralded as the hallmark of American democracy.⁵⁹ "We have nothing to promote if we become a fortress society," the most eloquent exponent of this view, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, has tried to explain. "The only triumph of terrorism is if we become terrified."⁶⁰ And, this is of course what terrorists aim to do.

Terrorism is fundamentally the use (or threatened use) of violence in order to achieve profound and far-reaching psychological effects in a particular target audience. The fomenting of widespread fear and intimidation is therefore ineluctably the terrorists' intent. Accordingly, by succumbing to terrorist threats and failing to distinguish between reasonable as opposed to catastrophic security choices, we risk making choices based on fear and anxiety rather than on realistic options derived from detailed consideration and exhaustive analysis. The current focus on "worst-case scenario" threat assessments that dominates almost all aspects of domestic planning and preparedness for potential acts of terrorism is a case in point. Precisely this

⁵⁹Comment of an identified participant at the "Symposium on Security and the Design of Public Buildings, November 30, 1999 quoted in GSA, *Balancing Security and Openness*, p. 8.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 1.

argument was made at a "Symposium on Security and the Design of Public Buildings" held in Washington, D.C. last November. In the open discussion that followed a number of presentations of different viewpoints, one of the general design principles identified in this context held that

Security should be designed to meet reasonable rather than rare, catastrophic threats. A balance of risk assessment and innovative design can provide a high degree of security without creating a fortress. Responding to the worst case scenario may enhance safety but at the high price of compromising a commitment to openness and accessibility.⁶¹

Indeed, the fixation on open-ended, lower probability threats, which in turn posit virtually limitless vulnerabilities, may not—as this report's previous chapter argued—reflect the realities of contemporary terrorist behavior and modus operandi. "This kind of analysis," Brian Jenkins similarly warned in testimony before Congress on a different, but relevant, context, "can degenerate into a fact-free scaffold of anxieties and arguments—dramatic, emotionally powerful, but analytically feeble."⁶²

In this respect, the protestations of law enforcement officials against re-opening Pennsylvania Avenue ignores the fact that the U.S. is incontrovertibly better prepared now to counter the threat of terrorism than it was five years ago. We should be careful therefore not to regard the terrorism threat and response environments as either static or "zero sum" in nature. As many of the serving and former law enforcement officials with whom we spoke correctly pointed out, terrorist aims and motivations have indeed changed in recent years and in this respect terrorist capabilities have also improved as have some of their tactics and weapons.⁶³ But, by the same token, such evolution and development has not occurred in a vacuum and the changes and

⁶¹Ibid., p. 10.

⁶²Jenkins testimony, "Combating Terrorism: Assessing the Threat," p. 4.

⁶³See also the remarks of Mr. Jim Rice, Head of the Domestic Terrorism Program, National Capital Response Squad, FBI summarized in GSA, *Balancing Security and Openness*, p. 3.

evolution apparent in terrorist capabilities apply also to improvements in government, law enforcement and intelligence capabilities as well. In this respect, response capabilities improve, physical security technologies advance and new countermeasures emerge capable of addressing a range of potential terrorist attack contingencies. Indeed, given the vastly increased attention, larger budgets and expanded number of law enforcement and intelligence personnel devoted to strengthening our counterterrorism response capabilities since the Oklahoma City bombing, the U.S. is arguably far better prepared to address this than ever before—and especially since the 1994/95 time frame when the existing security procedures along Pennsylvania Avenue were put into place. There is no reason, therefore, to assume that technological advances since that time may not have further enhanced the range of possible preventive and preemptive measures.

It is also worth noting that some of our worst fears of chemical and biological attacks and massive car and truck bombs exploding throughout the U.S. dating from that same 1995 time period have not been realized. These same dire prophecies forecast in the immediate aftermath of the Tokyo nerve gas attack and Murrah building bombings have in fact not come to pass. This is not simply a matter of sheer luck, but a reflection of the fact that our counterterrorist capabilities have not only improved but are continually improving. Indeed, this is one of the profoundest legacies of the Clinton administration: the considerable attention and resources that have been devoted to fighting terrorism since 1995—and which have arguably thwarted our persistent enemies like bin Laden for almost two years now. The U.S. is arguably now better prepared, equipped and poised to counter this menace than at any time in our nation's history. This realization should therefore be as much a factor in security planning and design as the worst case scenarios that are now almost reflexively embraced.

THE EFFECTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE'S CONTINUED CLOSURE

On a practical level, the closure of Pennsylvania Avenue has served to physically separate the District's older central business district west of the Executive Mansion from the concentration of new offices,

residences, restaurants and nightspots built east of the White House beginning in the 1980s and 1990s. The forced displacement of a significant number of vehicles from Pennsylvania Avenue onto nearby streets has created severe bottleneck and congestion problems throughout the downtown area. Before the closure in 1995, approximately 29,000 vehicles a day traversed the three blocks of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House. That diverted traffic was forced by the closing of the Avenue to use either a pair of one-way streets to the north (H Street and I Street), K Street, or Constitution Avenue on the south. Respective traffic volumes on these routes have since increased by between 30 and 50 percent, which has severely impacted--and adversely affected--the east-west flow of traffic in the District.⁶⁴ The net effect of these changes has been a dramatic increase in travel times throughout downtown Washington and such an increase in congestion that even the movement of emergency vehicles within and through the area has been adversely affected. This is seen as adding a dysfunctional quality to a city that is meant to represent and symbolize the continuity and integration that is inherent in American society.

Some also have viewed the closure as emblematic of the growing disconnection between branches of the federal government and between the federal government and District of Columbia city government in that the Treasury Department closed Pennsylvania Avenue with neither the advice nor consent of Congress nor of the city government and people of the District of Columbia.⁶⁵ Indeed, the disruption and inconvenience caused by the closure and the attendant financial and non-financial losses that it has generated argue further for the need of a reassessment of the 1995 decision.

However, disruptive as the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue has been, many observers feel that the far more significant adverse impact has

⁶⁴ Discussion with Parsons Transportation, Washington DC., 24 May 2000.

⁶⁵Forgey, "A Capital Under Security's Siege. Sen. Moynihan Calls for 'National Conversation,'" April 17, 1999; Lewis, "Shaping the City - Reopening Pennsylvania Avenue: Time to Take Down the Barriers," October 4, 1997; Fehr & Haggerty, "Barricades a Blow to Business. Downtown Pinched By Routing, Less Parking After Pennsylvania Ave. Closing," May 28, 1995.

been the sense that our democratic values, our sense of openness and community, have been compromised by this action. Pennsylvania Avenue is one of the principal thoroughfares in the Nation's Capital and its symbolic importance is underscored by the fact that it directly connects the Legislative and Executive branches of the Federal government. The image of Pennsylvania Avenue closed in front of the White House, all because of the threat of terrorism in the world's oldest and greatest democracy, creates an ominous and unwelcome impression. While there is widespread recognition and acceptance of the notion that reasonable security precautions must be taken to protect the President and the White House, there is an equally strong sense that fundamental American values should not be sacrificed in the name of security.

A SYNOPSIS OF OPTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES TO CLOSING PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE

Moreover, pertinent questions have been raised over the extent to which the White House actually represents a vulnerable target. As noted above, the stated rationale for the original decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue was the need to protect the President and the Executive Mansion from the type of cataclysmic truck bomb that destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City. However, several commentators have argued that, in many ways, the White House offers rather good natural protection from a vehicular explosive attack. A number of arguments have been marshaled in this regard:

- The stand-off area between the Executive Mansion and its northern perimeter more than meets the minimum security standard—30 meters (100 feet)—that is applied to U.S. embassies overseas because of fears of vehicular-borne explosive attacks. The White House is in fact set back some 350 feet from Pennsylvania Avenue which, according to several independent analyses, is sufficient to offset the effects of a major explosive force, arguably including even that of a large truck bomb.⁶⁶

⁶⁶See for instance, Elliot, "The Defense of Buildings Against Terrorism and Disorder. A Design Philosophy for the Construction of

- The White House, as previously noted, is also built on only three levels. This minimizes the danger of successive floor collapse, which was deemed to have been a critical factor in accounting for the excessively high casualty rate in Oklahoma City.⁶⁷
- The White House, as also was previously noted, has a low set, "box-type" geometrical configuration that is built around a framed steel structure which has positive ductile qualities. Both of these characteristics should thereby help to ensure that if any explosive damage does occur to the mansion, it will be localized as opposed to catastrophic.⁶⁸

Various design firms, structural engineers and security contractors have argued these features give the White House a high degree of natural resilience to vehicular terrorist bombings. In addition, they point out that the building could be further strengthened and its security enhanced through additional structural reinforcement and retrofit.⁶⁹ Modifications that have been typically highlighted include:

- the addition of mass and redundancy
- the strengthening of support and street facing walls

Ordinary Buildings and Installations to Resist Terrorism and Public Disorder," p. 402; National Research Council (NRC), *The Embassy of the Future. Recommendations for the Design of Future US Embassy Buildings* (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1986), p. 31. See also, John J. Strauchs, "Testimony before the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, House of Representatives concerning the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue in the vicinity of the White House for security reasons," June 7, 1996.

⁶⁷See, National Research Council, *Protecting Buildings from Bomb Damage*, p. 21; Associated Press, "Architect Sees His Work Turn to Rubble," *The Washington Post*, April 24, 1995.

⁶⁸National Research Council, *Protecting Buildings from Bomb Damage*, p. 56; Elliot, "The Defense of Buildings Against Terrorism and Disorder," p. 505; Lewis, "Shaping the City - Reopening Pennsylvania Avenue: Time to Take Down the Barriers," October 4, 1997.

⁶⁹Discussion with the Parsons Transportation Corporation and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) Architects, Washington D.C., May 24 and May 30, 2000. See also, Lewis, "Shaping the City - Reopening Pennsylvania Avenue: Time to Take Down the Barriers," October 4, 1997.

- the replacement of windows with galvanized shatter-proof glazing, and
- the incorporation of "blow out" panels and sacrificial elements designed to relieve and/or reduce blast pressure and amplification.⁷⁰

Notwithstanding the concerns cited by federal law enforcement officials cited above, a number of commentators have also asserted that an external laminated, high-tech explosion-resistant plexi-glass fence could in fact be used to effectively deflect the shock wave from a truck bomb away from the White House. They point out that precisely the same idea was proposed in 1996 by the Director of the Secret Service.⁷¹

Finally, some private security consultants have expressed concern over the utility of closing down Pennsylvania Avenue in terms of overall security both as it specifically effects the President and as it also potentially impacts on other government buildings and landmarks in the city. Three sets of differing arguments have been emphasized in this regard:

1. Preventing vehicular traffic from traveling in front of the White House does not obviate the threat to the President from either non-explosive threats, such as stand-off, remote-control mortar attacks and other types of assassination attempts, or from airborne bomb assaults carried out with micro light/ultra light planes against the White House grounds.⁷²
2. Closing Pennsylvania Avenue represents a fixed and visible level of protection. It has been suggested by one foreign security expert, with experience of executive protection

⁷⁰For further details of these various structural innovations see NRC, *Protecting Buildings from Bomb Damage*, pp. 54-57.

⁷¹Discussion with Parsons Corporation, Washington D.C., May 24, 2000. See also, Arthur Cotton Moore, "Letters to the editor - Americas Avenue," *The Washington Post*, July 13, 1996.

⁷²Moore, "Letters to the editor - Americas Avenue," July 13, 1996; and, Lewis, "Shaping the City - Reopening Pennsylvania Avenue: Time to Take Down the Barriers," October 4, 1997.

elsewhere, that less static and more discrete measures may be preferable in terms of threat mitigation.⁷³

3. It has also been intimated that the closure of Pennsylvania Avenue ignores one of the cardinal principles of security planning—uniform application. Because similar measures are not enacted at other high-profile buildings, a fear exists that threats to federal and government buildings elsewhere in the District may now have become disproportionately greater.⁷⁴

While none of the arguments presented here can be regarded in and of themselves as providing irrefutable evidence for reassessing the 1995 decision, they nonetheless collectively raise compelling issues that persuasively merit further consideration and discussion.

Above all else, however, any argument in favor of reopening Pennsylvania Avenue—or at the very least, re-opening discussion of the decision—begs the question of how this can be done while still ensuring the President, his family, and the White House staff with as much security as a democracy can provide while remaining true to our country's long-standing commitment to openness. In this respect, a number of options or alternatives have been proposed or are currently being examined that would address simultaneously the security and openness issues and, significantly, that would also mitigate the disruption and inconvenience that the closure has engendered, but nonetheless still ensure for the security of the President, the first family and White House personnel in addition to the Executive Mansion complex itself. The emergence and continued development of alternatives

⁷³Rohan Gunaratna, "Impact of Access Control on Protective Security: Closure of Pennsylvania Avenue for Vehicular Traffic," St. Andrews, Scotland: Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, unpublished study, May 2000, p. 2.

⁷⁴Strauchs, "Testimony before the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, House of Representatives concerning the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue in the vicinity of the White House for security reasons," June 7, 1996, p. 3. See also, Stephen C. Fehr, "D.C. Says No to Federal Parking Bans. Officials Respond to Residents' fears They're Slowly Being Cut Off From Their Own City," *The Washington Post*, July 1, 1995.

that might not have been apparent or even possible five years ago, alone provides compelling justification for such a reassessment.

One option, for instance, proposes the construction of a short tunnel beneath Pennsylvania Avenue in tandem with the longer tunnel south of the White House, between the Ellipse on E Street, that would maintain cross-town traffic flow—and still allow for the maintenance of an enhanced security regime around the Executive Residence. Alternative ideas to reconstruct Pennsylvania Avenue with a depressed slot configured in such a way that any blast from a truck bomb would be deflected upwards, away from the White House and other surrounding buildings, have also been suggested.⁷⁵ Neither, however, has received particularly favorable consideration: largely due to concerns stemming from cost, aesthetic appeal, disruption and perceived effectiveness.⁷⁶ They are also at odds with plans to expand underground office space and parking beneath the White House West Wing, beneath Pennsylvania Avenue and towards the New Executive Office Building across the street.⁷⁷

Instead, attention has focused on changes in the configuration of Pennsylvania Avenue itself, as well as development of some form of barrier system that would allow access to Pennsylvania Avenue for passenger cars, taxicabs, and sport utility vehicles (SUVs) while preventing the entry of trucks, buses, and other large vehicles.

Prior to May 1995, approximately 29,000 vehicles a day traversed the now closed portion of Pennsylvania Avenue.⁷⁸ In the area between 15th Street, NW, and 17th Street, NW, Pennsylvania Avenue had three east bound and three westbound travel lanes, plus a broad paved median strip.

⁷⁵Stephen C. Fehr, "Architects Envision A Pedestrian Plaza," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1995; Moore, "Letters to the editor - Americas Avenue," July 13, 1996; John Carl Warnecke, "A Pennsylvania Avenue for the People," *The Washington Post*, August 9, 1998, p. C2.

⁷⁶Discussion with Parsons Transportation Corporation, Washington D.C., May 24, 2000. Similar comments were expressed to the authors during a telephone interview conducted with William T. Coleman, Washington, D.C. June 2, 2000.

⁷⁷See U.S. Park Service. *The White House and President's Park: Comprehensive Design Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement*. (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, September 1999).

⁷⁸Discussion with Parsons Transportation, Washington, D.C., 24 May 2000.

Transportation experts who have studied the issue believe that Pennsylvania Avenue can be narrowed significantly - to two lanes in each direction - without sacrificing anything in terms of the Avenue's capacity to move traffic efficiently.⁷⁹ Narrowing the roadway to a total of four lanes presupposes that these travel lanes are for through traffic only and that no standing or stopping will be permitted at any time.

A secondary benefit of narrowing the roadway would be that the southern curb lane of the Avenue (the curb nearest to the White House) would be moved an additional 40 feet to the north, thereby moving all vehicular traffic that much farther away from the White House. The stand-off distance from the south curb of the Avenue to the White House under a narrowed, east-west alignment would be roughly 325 feet, which is more than three times the stand-off distance applied to U.S. embassies overseas to protect them against vehicle-borne explosive attacks.

In addition to narrowing the roadway, there are measures that can be taken from an urban design perspective to mitigate security concerns around the White House. In the course of researching the latter, a design recommendation for Pennsylvania Avenue that was initially suggested in 1802 by President Thomas Jefferson was discovered. Jefferson proposed that the portion of Pennsylvania Avenue that extends from Madison Place to Jackson Place be gently curved to the north. This so-called "Jefferson Bow" would mirror the curvilinear design of the driveway within the White House grounds.

In comparison to the current, straight east-west alignment of Pennsylvania Avenue, the introduction of the Jefferson Bow would have the further benefit of moving the roadway an additional 60 feet away from the White House, increasing the stand-off distance to 385 feet.⁸⁰

Recognizing that there is a direct relationship between the size of a vehicle and the size of any explosive device that could be concealed within it, there is agreement that it would be prudent to permanently

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Discussion with Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, Washington, D.C., 30 May 2000.

bar large vehicles from the three-block portion of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House. To achieve this goal, some form of fixed barrier must be constructed that would permit access to Pennsylvania Avenue by cars, taxicabs, and sport utility vehicles while preventing entry by trucks, buses, or other unauthorized vehicles.

Among a variety of approaches looked at, the most effective in security terms and one that would work from an urban design perspective entails the construction of two pedestrian bridges, to be located slightly in-bound of Pennsylvania Avenue's intersections with Madison Place and Jackson Place, respectively. These bridges would have a vertical clearance of approximately 7 feet 6 inches. The bridges would permit pedestrians to move seamlessly between Lafayette Park on the north side of the Avenue and a larger, landscaped area on the north side of the White House fence -- the south side of the Avenue. The pedestrian bridges, which would be structurally capable of stopping any large vehicle in its tracks, could be designed such that they could be picked up and removed via flat bed truck for the quadrennial Inaugural Parade. In researching possible design schemes for the bridges, an example was found in New York's Central Park of a pedestrian bridge whose dimensions are nearly identical to what would be called for on Pennsylvania Avenue.⁸¹

In addition to new signage and the pedestrian bridges that would physically preclude the entry of large vehicles to the portion of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House, attractively designed, manned security kiosks could be located at both the 15th Street and 17th Street intersections with Pennsylvania Avenue. These manned kiosks, combined with enhanced visual and electronic surveillance, and the aforementioned physical changes in the configuration of Pennsylvania Avenue would permit the controlled re-opening of the Avenue while providing an appropriate level of security for the President.⁸²

Finally, from a purely transportation point of view, it is not necessary to keep Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House open to traffic 24 hours a day. Thus, it would be possible to bar all

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

traffic from the affected portion of the Avenue from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. without greatly impairing the movement of traffic in downtown Washington. While proponents of reopening the Avenue are not recommending this course of action, they recognize that keeping the Avenue open only 16 hours a day would potentially reduce the manpower demands on the Secret Service and other law enforcement agencies.⁸³

⁸³ Discussion with Parsons Transportation, Washington, D.C., 24 May 2000.

4. A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF SECURITY MEASURES IN FORCE IN FOREIGN CAPITAL CITIES

Do security measures adopted overseas have any relevance for the U.S. in relation to possible contingencies against truck bomb attacks? Two capital cities that have avoided closing down major thoroughfares and avenues despite being confronted with serious campaigns of terrorism are London and Paris. However, in each of these cases, the contingencies that have been instituted reflect specific contextual circumstances and situations which will obviously vary from the situation in the Washington, D.C. area. Nonetheless, the situations in this select sample of foreign capitals is worth briefly reviewing.

LONDON

During the first half of the 1990s, London was subjected to a particularly intensive campaign of Provisional IRA (PIRA) terrorism. Carried out under the auspices of that organization's "England Department," the most serious incidents included attacks against the Prime Minister's official residence at Number 10 Downing Street in 1991 and 1992. The first occurred in February 1991, at the height of the Persian Gulf War, when PIRA managed to launch several remote control mortars from a van parked on Horse Guards Parade, into the garden behind the executive building, shattering the windows in the room where 15 ministers and officials of the (Gulf) War Cabinet were then meeting. Four people were injured in the attack.⁸⁴ The second incident took place a little under a year later in February 1992 when a PIRA incendiary device exploded less than 300 meters from Downing Street, though this time little damage was sustained as the surrounding area had already been evacuated following a telephone warning.⁸⁵

⁸⁴Stewart Tendler, "A crude and lethal weapon to thwart the security forces," *The Times* (London), February 8, 1991; and, Will Bennett "Simple bombs improved but lack accuracy," *Independent* (London), February 8, 1991.

⁸⁵For further details see J. Bowyer Bell, *The Irish troubles: A Generation of Violence 1967-1992* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993), p.786; and John Gearson and Lawrence Freedman, "Financial Centres and

There have also been two massive truck bombings in the heart of the City's financial district—St Mary's Axe in 1992 and Bishop's Gate in 1993—that are of relevance. The St Mary's Axe blast was described "as the most powerful explosion in London since World War II," when a bomb constructed of up to a ton of fertilizer (ammonium nitrate) exploded outside the Baltic Exchange building in the heart of the city's financial center, killing three persons, wounding 90 others, and leaving a 12-foot wide crater and causing \$1.25 billion in damage.⁸⁶ Exactly a year later, a similar bomb devastated the nearby Bishops Gate district, killing one person and injuring more than 40 others. Initial estimates put the damage at \$1.5 billion.⁸⁷ These two attacks devastated the heart of London's financial district and were intentionally designed to severely undermine London's prestige as a world financial center.⁸⁸

The threat of future, repeated attacks and of an intensified campaign of sabotage directed against Britain's economic nerve center, was taken very seriously. Accordingly, in response to these assaults, a so-called "Traffic Management Scheme" (TMS) was instituted in 1993 that has since monitored all traffic entering or leaving the square mile vicinity of the inner City of London. Unofficially known as the "ring of steel," the now-routine operation involves police cordons, random vehicular checks, mobile "rolling road blocks" and high definition closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras positioned along critical

the Terrorism Threat: The Case of the IRA's British Mainland Campaign," paper delivered before the RAND/Oklahoma "Terrorism and Beyond: The 21st Century" International Conference, Oklahoma City, 17-19 April 2000, pp. 10 & 12.

⁸⁶William E. Schmidt, "One Dead, 40 Hurt as Blast Rips Central London," *New York Times*, 25 April 1993. See also, William E. Schmidt, "With London Still in Bomb Shock, Major Appoints His New Cabinet," *New York Times*, 12 April 1992; "Delays Seen in London," *New York Times*, 13 April 1992; Peter Rodgers, "City bomb claims may reach £1bn," *The Independent* (London), 14 April 1992; and David Connell, "IRA City bomb was fertilizer," *The Independent* (London), 28 May 1992.

⁸⁷Schmidt, "One Dead, 40 Hurt as Blast Rips Central London," 25 April 1993; and Richard W. Stevenson, "I.R.A. Says It Placed Fatal Bomb; London Markets Rush to Reopen," *New York Times*, 26 April 1993.

⁸⁸See, for instance, Cathy Milton, Jimmy Burns and Richard Lapper, "Shattered City Strives for Business as Usual," *The Financial Times* (London), April 13, 1992; and "Banks Take Brunt of Bishopsgate Bomb," *The Daily Telegraph* (London), April 26, 1993.

streets and at key intersections. Every car, truck or van that enters the City has its license plate fed immediately into a centralized database, where it is automatically traced and cross-referenced with police and Department of Transport (DoT) national vehicular registration records. In addition, an advanced surveillance network known as Mandrake was introduced in 1998 and is used to rapidly identify the faces of known or suspected terrorists by matching the physical facial features of pedestrians with criminal photographs stored in computerized police information banks.⁸⁹

The institution of this monitoring system has allowed the British authorities to maintain a largely unrestricted traffic flow in the heart of London. Although Downing Street, where the Prime Minister's official residence is located, itself is closed to ordinary traffic and restrictions to traffic have been introduced on the roundabout system immediately outside Buckingham Palace closing access to the roadway around the historic fountain in front, neither street represents a major thoroughfare in terms of vehicular volume to the extent that Pennsylvania Avenue does. Indeed, more important London routes such as Whitehall, Pall Mall, Victoria Embankment and Westminster Avenue remain open and, despite passing directly in front of buildings that symbolize the seat of British power and government (e.g., the Parliament Buildings and Big Ben, the Ministry of Defence, and Foreign Ministry) or of Britain's rich historical heritage (e.g., Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral), no moves have ever been made to pedestrianize them or otherwise restrict vehicular traffic or access. Just as critically from a public management and policy viewpoint, the "ring of steel" has become more or less an integral part of daily London life and is now largely accepted by commuters, business groups and motoring organizations.

This being said, there would be some challenges involved in introducing a scheme such as the TMS to Washington, D.C. Unlike the District of Columbia, the City of London exists and functions in a very

⁸⁹Gearson and Freedman, "Financial Centres and the Terrorism Threat: The Case of the IRA's British Mainland Campaign," 21, 25; James Hardy, "City Gets Cameras that Can Spot Terrorists," *The Sunday Telegraph* (London), August 2, 1998.

small, geographically limited, self-contained area, which makes perimeter surveillance both feasible and reasonably secure. Enacting similar measures around the District of Columbia in its entirety would pose a challenging, if not, overwhelming task that would have problems in achieving the same high degree of security confidence. The City of London is also very thinly populated in terms of permanent residents, which has undoubtedly helped to avail public acceptance of the TMS. Automated surveillance systems of this sort would have difficulties operating as efficiently in the District of Columbia, given the far greater number of people that actually live in the city's environs. In addition, it is worth noting that, in many respects, the perceived threat of truck bombs is probably not as great in Britain as it is in the U.S. given PIRA's track-record of targeting, generally with prior warning, commercial buildings at night or on the weekends that are therefore mostly empty of their occupants. This has, arguably, allowed British government and security officials to accept a higher threshold of potential risk than their counterparts in the U.S., where, thanks to events such as the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings—both of which occurred during working hours on a Friday afternoon and a Thursday morning respectively—concern over mass civilian attacks remain paramount. Finally, unlike the U.S., Britain because of its smaller population has a national vehicle registration system which facilitates immediate information retrieval from one centralized database. In the U.S., of course, there is no national department of motor vehicle (DMV) registration like in Britain: instead each state has its own DMV which, given the large number of vehicles registered in the U.S., would render expeditious identification of ownership and registration, problematical.

PARIS

Contingencies in Paris are essentially defined by the Vigipirate Plan, which was introduced following a wave of bombings that rocked the country in 1995. Between July and October, terrorists belonging to the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA), using bombs fashioned with four-inch nails wrapped around camping style cooking-gas canisters, killed eight persons and wounded more than 180 others. The targets were almost

invariably public gathering places and were therefore calculated by the perpetrators to inflict wanton harm on ordinary bystanders and passersby. They included the Paris metro (subway), popular tourist attractions, sidewalk cafes, schools, etc. Under the counterterrorist plan, which was implemented immediately in response to the first attacks, some 32,000 soldiers, police and customs officials were mobilized, who in turn checked the identities and documents of nearly three million persons—of whom 70,000 were detained for further questioning.⁹⁰

Vigipirate essentially involved a seven-tiered strategy that is designed to be deliberately flexible, allowing countermeasures to be upgraded or downgraded according to the situation at hand and current, ongoing, assessment of the terrorist threat. The plan is, thus, neither based on worst case scenarios, nor did it proceed from a presumed assumption that, once instituted, contingencies cannot be rolled back or scaled down. Three areas are emphasized as having particular importance: protection of government buildings; securing soft civilian targets such as schools and libraries; and, mitigating the potential threat of truck bombs.⁹¹

As with the City of London, these objectives have been accomplished without closing down or sealing off major roads and thoroughfares in Paris, including those immediately adjacent to the presidential residence. According to senior French counterterrorism intelligence officials interviewed as part of this project, two elements have been critical in the plan's success to date: thorough penetration of GIA

⁹⁰Ben Macintyre, "French police seize bombs and rifles in Paris dawn raids," *Times* (London), February 20, 1996. See also, "St Michel Bomb: Islamist Connection 'Most Likely,'" *Le Figaro* (Paris), July 27, 1995; Med Berkhan, "Islamists: The Division of Europe," *Le Point* (Paris), September 2, 1995; and, Ben Macintyre, "Parisians face up to security failure," *Times* (London), October 19, 1995.

⁹¹Discussions with senior French counter-terrorism officials, Paris, April 28, 2000. See also "Plan Vigipirate et appel a la vigilance," *Societe* (Paris), December 6, 1996, accessed via <http://www.humanite.presse.fr/journal/1996>; Adam Sage and Francois Raitberger, "France Acts to Combat Bombers," *The Australian* (Brisbane), September 12, 1995; and "France Relaxes Anti-Terror Plan but Keeps Frontier Controls," *Agence France-Presse*, January 11, 1996.

cells operating in France, which represent the preeminent, current terrorist threat; and greatly reducing truck traffic within Paris' inner precincts by maintaining a de-facto *cordon sanitaire* around the city's outer ring road.⁹²

Again, however, it is not certain how easily these contingencies would translate to a Washington, D.C., much less a wider American context. Restricting vehicular traffic from the confines of the District of Columbia would not be commercially possible given the number of businesses and commercial outlets that are located in the downtown area. Equally, while proactive intelligence gathering must be viewed as a critical component of any counterterrorism program, it has been facilitated by the fact that French security officials are essentially confronting a known and mostly single adversarial quantity—the GIA. This does not apply to the U.S., where potential threats could conceivably emanate from a whole range of anti-government extremists, both domestic and foreign-based. Finally, American counterterrorism officials have been quick to point out, that although the street beside the French presidential palace does indeed remain open to traffic without restriction, the building, itself is protected by a high perimeter wall and a considerably distant set-back. It is also not open to the public.⁹³

⁹²Discussions with senior French counter-terrorism officials, Paris, April 28, 2000.

⁹³Discussion with former senior FBI official responsible for counterterrorism, May 30, 2000.

5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

For most of the White House's 200 year-old existence, U.S. presidents have embraced the Jeffersonian principle of maintaining the Executive Mansion as the "People's House": that is, keeping it as open and accessible to the public as possible. This tradition has created and preserved an image apparent to both American citizens and foreign visitors alike that the United States is an open society with an open and accessible form of government. Indeed, these democratic attributes of openness and accessibility have been maintained for two centuries despite the changing security environments that have unfolded throughout the country's history. The freedom and openness visible in the nation's capital city is thus a reflection of American democratic values and leadership world-wide. As such, issues of freedom and accessibility within the District of Columbia take on a level of importance well beyond those of other cities across the country. This image is in fact a matter of national importance: reflecting core American values at large.

During the 1980s, however, terrorist concerns began to evoke heightened security around the White House, initiating a process of fortification that culminated with President Clinton's decision in April 1995 to close the section of Pennsylvania Avenue running directly in front of the Executive Mansion. The closure of the street has been the subject of intense debate, not least because of the disruption it has caused but also for other even more important reasons, such as its questionable utility in security terms as well as the symbolically dysfunctional nature of initiating such a contingency as a permanent feature of the nation's capital. Within this context, RAND was tasked by the Federal City Council to examine the question of whether Pennsylvania Avenue could be re-opened without unduly exacerbating the threat to the life of the President from a cataclysmic truck bomb attack—the publicly stated rationale for the roadway's original closure.

The impact of closing Pennsylvania Avenue has been considerable. Economically, the cost has been substantial. Direct losses resulting from reduced parking meter and ticket revenue as well as higher Metrobus capital expenses due to the forced re-routing of scheduled services has been estimated at \$460,628 a year. Since 1995, parking meter losses alone have totaled over \$728,000, with modifications to the Washington Metro Area Transit Authority (WMATA) network costing the District of Columbia an additional \$1,575,000.

Indirectly, closing Pennsylvania Avenue has negatively impacted on business efficiency in the downtown area by increasing traffic volumes and congestion at key intersections. For certain firms this has meant higher overhead costs in terms of delivery and consignment charges, while for others it has led to a decline in productivity because of longer employee commuting times. Somewhat more seriously, it has compromised two principal reasons for conducting business in the District: proximity and convenience. This has encouraged—or compelled—several firms to relocate from the inner downtown area, lowering retail sales and property tax values, which has further impacted on the District's overall revenue base.

Altered traffic patterns as a result of closing Pennsylvania Avenue have also been highly inconvenient, displacing a significant number of vehicles onto contiguous streets, which has created severe bottleneck and congestion problems in the downtown area. Between 27,000 and 28,000 cars a day are known to have traveled along Pennsylvania Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets prior to May 1995, the majority of which are now forced to use Constitution Avenue and H, I and K Streets. Respective traffic volumes on these routes have since risen by between 30 and 50 percent, which has severely impacted on the East-West flow of traffic in the District of Columbia. Anecdotal evidence from office workers, shoppers, commuters and cabdrivers, suggests that this has increased the trip across downtown by at least 15 minutes and, depending on the time of day, possibly by as much as 45 minutes.

Closing Pennsylvania Avenue has been just as problematic in a symbolic sense. In many ways, the 1995 decision reflects a "bunker mentality" that is completely at odds with the perceived strengths of

American democracy and the freedom of access that underscored Jefferson's own vision of the White House. It should also be pointed out that sealing the roadway serves to physically separate the District of Columbia's older central business district west of the Executive Mansion and the concentration of offices, luxury residences and nightspots built east of the White House in the 1980s and 1990s. This adds a highly undesirable dysfunctional quality to a city that is meant to represent and symbolize the continuity and integration that is inherent in American society. To a certain extent, the closure is also emblematic of the growing disconnection between branches of the federal government and between the federal and District of Columbia city government. This disconnection is perhaps highlighted most dramatically in the way by which the Treasury Department closed the Avenue with neither the advice nor consent of either Congress or the District of Columbia city government and moreover that now appears to have been intended to be permanent from its inception and to which there is to be no means whatsoever of redress or reclama.

In addition to these concerns, questions arise over the extent to which the White House actually represents a vulnerable target. As noted above, the stated rationale for the original decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue was the need to protect the President and the Executive Mansion from a cataclysmic truck bomb. However, in many ways, the White House offers extremely good natural protection from a vehicular explosive attack:

- The stand-off area between the Executive Mansion and its northern perimeter more than meets the minimum security standard of 30 meters or 100 feet that is applied to U.S. embassies overseas, which arguably are at greater and more omnipresent peril from terrorist attack. The White House is set back some 350 feet from Pennsylvania Avenue which, according to several independent analyses, is more than sufficient to offset the effects of a major explosive force. Further, the adoption of the "Jeffersonian bow" concept would extend that setback at least a further 35 to 40 feet. In this

context, it should be recalled that the 1995 truck bomb explosion in Oklahoma City—the incident which reportedly figured so prominently in the President's decision to finally accede to the Secret Service's repeated entreaties to close Pennsylvania Avenue—was situated just 10 feet from the Murrah building and moreover was located in close proximity to one of the structure's four main support columns.

- The White House is built on only three levels. This minimizes the danger of successive floor collapse, a critical factor in accounting for the excessively high casualty rate in previous truck bomb attacks.
- In 1948, the White House was completely fireproofed under the direction of the Commission of the Renovation of the Executive Mansion. This has served to greatly reduce the risk of the building burning out of control, another major proven cause of death and injury following terrorist explosions. Indeed, since that time additional strengthening and reinforcement to windows, window-frames and walls has been carried out.
- The White House has a low set, "box-type" geometrical configuration and is built around a framed steel structure that has positive ductile qualities. Both of these characteristics should help to ensure that if any explosive damage does occur to the mansion, it will be localized as opposed to catastrophic, occurring at the front of the building where the President spends comparatively little time.

Design firms, structural engineers and security contractors have argued that these features give the White House a high degree of natural resilience to vehicular terrorist bombings, adding that they could be easily enhanced through structural reinforcement and retrofit.

Modifications that have been typically highlighted include:

- the addition of mass and redundancy,
- the strengthening of support and street facing walls,

- the replacement of windows with galvanized shatter-proof glazing, and
- the incorporation of "blow out" panels and sacrificial elements designed to relieve and/or reduce blast pressure and amplification.

A number of commentators have also asserted that an external laminated, high-tech explosion-resistant plexi-glass fence could be used to deflect the shock wave from a truck bomb away from the White House, pointing out that such an idea was first proposed by the Secret Service Director himself in 1996.⁹⁴

Finally, it is possible to identify at least two sets of concerns with regard to the utility of closing down Pennsylvania Avenue from the Treasury Department and White House's stated security objectives:

- First, preventing vehicular traffic from traveling in front of the White House does nothing to protect the life of the President from either non-explosive threats, such as mortar attacks and assassination attempts, or airborne bomb assaults carried out with microlight/ultralight planes. It is the one, however, that has the most immediate impact on the surrounding community and sends the clearest and most visible message to those both in this country and abroad who look to the U.S. for democratic leadership.
- Second, the closure of Pennsylvania Avenue ignores one of the cardinal principles of security planning - uniform application. Because similar measures are not enacted at other high-profile government buildings and national landmarks throughout the District of Columbia, threats to other less well-protected

⁹⁴As previously noted, other knowledgeable observers have raised doubts that such a plexi-glass shield could withstand the explosive impact from a large bomb and moreover that it could present a hazard in the form of shrapnel directed against anyone in the vicinity of such a blast. Nonetheless, further examination is needed to determine the viability of this measure for its potentially additional protective value.

federal and government buildings elsewhere in the District may now ironically be greater.

Within the context of the original justification for closing Pennsylvania Avenue—namely the need to protect the life of the President from a cataclysmic truck bomb attack—a range of potential alternatives and options deserve thoughtful consideration and careful evaluation:

1. The section of Pennsylvania Avenue that runs in front of the White House could be bounded by a pair of pedestrian bridges that could be constructed in such a way that they effectively prevent access to trucks, buses, and other large vehicles. This would maintain a largely unhindered traffic flow of at least two lanes running in each direction while providing a formidable barrier to ingress and egress of vehicles outside defined height, width, and weight restrictions. These bridges could be constructed in such a manner that they would simultaneously provide the requisite security while maintaining the actual as well as symbolic accessibility of the entire White House area.
2. Defensive measures could be instituted to Pennsylvania Avenue itself. The road could be reconstructed to incorporate a modified "Jeffersonian bow" that would curve the mid-section of the Avenue northwards, adding another 35 to 40 feet of standoff distance in front of the White House. Curbside lanes and parking could also be permanently eliminated, leaving what would, in effect, become a four lane no-stopping carriage way.
3. Physical counter-measures could be further enhanced through the introduction of state-of-the-art detection technology, including video surveillance and "in-road" explosive trace sensors. Such high-tech innovations could be combined with the establishment of a dedicated and highly visible executive protection force, perhaps possessing a different set of skills, training, armaments and organization than currently exists.

The added benefit of such a unit has, arguably, not been fully appreciated, especially in the context of its potential additional deterrent value. Again, all these measures could achieve the goal of securing the President's personal protection from catastrophic truck bomb threats while still remaining true to the principles of open access and unrestricted freedom of movement around our nation's most important historical landmarks.

To be sure, none of these measures are fool-proof and all could conceivably be defeated by a determined suicide attack involving a fanatically driven terrorist. The same caveat of course also applies to the entire spectrum of threats directed against the President. However, the issue here is not one of protecting the President from all possible contingencies; it is about enacting appropriate security measures that address reasonable threat contingencies within the context of an acceptable level of risk.

All open democratic societies must live within a threshold of security that necessarily falls below 100 percent—as, indeed, does the President himself every time he ventures out in public. In countering the range of potential threats to the White House, the goal should be to provide a level of protection that addresses plausible scenarios while preserving, to the greatest possible extent, the symbolic freedom that is an inherent feature of this particular national landmark. Striking this type of balance will never be easy, particularly in a city such as Washington D.C. where any number of federal government buildings exist that could also conceivably be targeted in any terrorist attack. However, just as we don't attempt to insist on blanket security around every possible terrorist target throughout the entire city, we should also endeavor to avoid measures that do not reflect reasonable contingencies in relation to specific persons and/or buildings.

Current security preparedness around the White House reflects a law enforcement predilection that the only way to satisfactorily protect the President is on the basis of worst case scenarios and through the establishment of a vehicular traffic-free *cordon sanitaire* imposed on

the neighborhood surrounding the Executive Mansion. Not only does this fail to equate with the somewhat mixed picture of recent terrorist trends, where many of our greatest fears and anxieties have never materialized; it also ignores the inherently dynamic nature of the terrorist response environment and its ability to foster new response capabilities. Certainly the U.S. is better prepared to address the terrorist threat than ever before: reflecting the tremendously increased attention, budgets, and personnel that have been devoted to this particular problem over the past five years. These considerations should be as much a factor in decision-making as the reflexively embraced alarmism that is apparent in aspects of the nation's current counterterrorist planning: something that has been particularly acute in relation to White House security and protection.

Appendix

A. QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What were the primary factors that were considered in the decision to close Pennsylvania Avenue?

Probes:

- What was the purpose of closing down Pennsylvania Avenue?
- What were the original decision-making processes?
- Have these processes changed since the original decision was taken?
- Who were the decision-makers?
- Are these decision-makers still in place?
- What groups were consulted and why?

2. Having taken the decision to close down Pennsylvania Avenue, was any thought given to assessing how long the Ave. should stay closed?

Probes (if yes):

- What factors were considered?
- Are these factors still relevant to conditions and threat levels as they exist today?
- Has there, in fact, been a re-examination of the original decision?
- (Only if not answered) Has there been any serious assessment of whether the decision to close Penn. Ave. has created different threats to the White House (such as mortar attacks from roof tops or contiguous access roads)?

Probes (if no):

- Why was there no consideration of this?
- Has any thought recently been given to creating a reassessment process?
 - If yes, why?
 - If no, why?

3. In looking to the future, have any alternatives been examined other than the complete closure of Pennsylvania Avenue?

Probes (if yes):

- What are the alternatives?
- Who evaluates these alternatives and their applicability?
- Can these alternatives be reasonably implemented in terms of cost and potential disruption?
- Were any public/interest groups consulted in developing and assessing these alternatives?

Probes (if no):

- Why have other alternatives not been considered?

4. Broadening the focus from the White House to external physical security in general, have the responses of other major capital cities faced with serious terrorist threats been examined?

Probes (if yes):

- Are these responses applicable to Washington DC?
- (If applicable) Have any of the lessons from other major cities been incorporated into physical counter-terrorist planning?

Probes (if no):

- Why have the experiences of other major capital cities not been considered?

5. In terms of threat perception, what is the greatest type of danger posed by terrorists in Washington DC today?

Probes:

- How are threat assessments made (current threat perceptions/worst case scenarios)?
- Is the terrorist threat confronting Washington DC today the same

as it was since the decision was taken to close down Penn.
Ave.

- (If no):
 - Has it increased or decreased?
 - Has it changed in terms of level, type or both?
 - How does the continued closure of Pennsylvania Avenue address this threat?
 - How do physical security measures incorporated at other Federal buildings address this threat?

B. MAJOR SECURITY BREACHES PRIOR TO THE INSTITUTION OF THE 1994 WHITE HOUSE SECURITY REVIEW

February 17, 1974: Helicopter Assault on White House

On the night of February 17, 1974, Pfc. Robert K. Preston, an Army helicopter mechanic at Fort Meade, Maryland, stole a helicopter from the army base and flew it toward the White House Complex. After receiving a complaint from a citizen that Preston had landed briefly in a trailer park near Jessup, Maryland before taking off again, Maryland State Police scrambled two police helicopters in pursuit of the stolen chopper. Preston flew the helicopter down the Baltimore-Washington Parkway towards downtown Washington, D.C., buzzing traffic along the parkway.⁹⁵ He passed over the Executive Mansion and hovered over the South Lawn, briefly touching down before flying toward the Washington Monument. Due to the fact that the EPS did not know who was piloting the aircraft and was unaware that it had been stolen from Fort Meade, there was no attempt made to shoot it down. At the monument grounds, Preston hovered for five minutes before flying across to the White House, almost ramming one of the Maryland state helicopters that had been pursuing him.

Meanwhile, the Executive Protection Service had been alerted to Preston entering restricted airspace and turned on the White House floodlights.⁹⁶ As the helicopter made its second pass of the White House grounds, EPS agents opened fire on the helicopter, blasting it with shotgun and submachine-gun fire and forcing the helicopter down. Preston was immediately subdued by EPS and Metropolitan police officers; he suffered superficial shotgun wounds.⁹⁷ Preston would later be sentenced by a court martial to several years of hard labor and fined

⁹⁵Richard L. Madden, "Soldier Lands Helicopter On White House Lawn," *The New York Times*, February 18, 1974, pp. 1 & 50.

⁹⁶U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Public Report of the White House Security Review*, p. 99.

⁹⁷Madden, "Soldier Lands Helicopter On White House Lawn," p. 50.

\$2,400; his private single-engine pilot's license was also revoked by the FAA.⁹⁸

The December 25, 1974 Marshall Fields Gate Crashing Incident

On Christmas Day, Marshall Fields, dressed like an Arab and claiming to be carrying explosives, crashed his Chevrolet Caprice through the northwest gate of the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue. The gate was heavily damaged and failed to disable the car. After driving up to within 10 feet of the White House North Portico, Fields got out of the car with what appeared to be explosives attached to his body. He removed black satchels from the car and placed them in front of him as he stood for the next four hours in front the West Wing of the White House. Fields also had in his hands what appeared to be wires for the explosives he was allegedly carrying. According to the EPS, Fields was not "neutralized" because the security forces believed Fields was carrying explosives and the President was not in the White House at the time. Mr. Fields' only request was to talk to the Pakistani Ambassador; he demanded that his request be played over the Howard University radio station. After hearing that the request was announced on the radio station, Fields surrendered.⁹⁹ Security officials quickly apprehended him and bomb squad and fire officials moved in to remove the "explosives", which, after examination, turned out to be flares.¹⁰⁰ Fields was sentenced to eighteen months in jail for destruction of property.¹⁰¹

The September 12, 1994 Plane Crash on the White House South Lawn

Shortly before midnight on the evening of September 11, 1994, Frank Eugene Corder stole an airplane from Aldino Airport in Churchville, Maryland, and flew it toward Washington, D.C.. The airplane was first

⁹⁸Associated Press, "Soldier Gets Year Term for Helicopter Incident," *The New York Times*, August 30, 1974, p. 10; UPI, "Pilot's License Revoked," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1974, p. 34.

⁹⁹Philip Shabecoff, "Intruder in Car Smashes White House Gate," *The New York Times*, December 26, 1974, pp. 1 & 24.

¹⁰⁰U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Public Report of the White House Security Review*, p. 93.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 50.

detected at 1:06 PM by FAA radar at Baltimore/Washington International Airport. At 1:44 PM, the control tower at Reagan National Airport picked up the radar signal from Corder's airplane, which was now 6.5 miles north of the White House flying at an altitude of 2700 feet. Over the next three minutes, the airplane descended approximately 1000 feet and turned directly south. It flew over Washington Circle and entered the protected airspace over the White House known as P-56. This no-fly zone extends from the White House to the Mall and from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, and can only be entered by authorized aircraft. The airplane then banked left in a U-turn near the Washington Monument and headed straight towards the Executive Mansion. Descending rapidly, the plane passed over the Ellipse and crashed onto the White House lawn at approximately 1:49 AM. The plane skidded across the lawn, struck a tree just west of the South Portico and crashed into the southwest corner of the Executive Mansion below the President's bedroom.¹⁰²

The October 29, 1994 White House Shooting

On October 29, 1994, Francisco Martin Duran walked in front of the White House, pulled out an SKS semi-automatic rifle from under his trench coat and began firing at the north face of the White House. After the initial burst of gunfire, he ran from east to west toward the Treasury Building, continuing to fire occasionally through the fence. When Duran paused to reload, he was tackled by a tourist and subdued with the help of two other citizens, who held Duran until the Secret Service Uniform Division could arrive. In total, Duran was able to fire at least 29 rounds before being subdued; eleven of these rounds struck the White House façade on the North Side and one bullet penetrated a window in the Press Briefing Room in the West Wing.¹⁰³

¹⁰²Department of the Treasury, *Public Report of the White House Security Review*, pp. 32-33.

¹⁰³Ibid.

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